

Perspectives on Life and Health

A qualitative study among same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

*Thesis submitted to the partial fulfilment of the Master of
Philosophy Degree in International Community Health*



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ACRONYMS

AFP: Agence France-Presse, a news agency

ART: Antiretroviral Therapy

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

BCC: Behaviour Change Communication

CSA: Central Statistics Authority

DHS: Demographic and Health Survey

EFDRE: Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic

EOTC: Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

HAPCO: HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office

HSDP: Health Systems Development Program

HCT: HIV Counselling and Testing

IRB: Internal Review Board

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

MSM: Men who have Sex with Men

MUHAS: Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

REK: Regional Ethics Committee, Norwegian medical research ethics agency

STI: Sexually Transmitted Infections

UiO: University of Oslo

UNAIDS: Joint United Nations Program for AIDS

VOA: Voice of America, media agency

WHO: World Health Organization

DEFINITION OF LOCAL TERMS

1. *Setaset*: means *feminine*. A male person in Ethiopia acting like ‘a female’ may be characterized as *setaset*, meaning feminine. Among the typical features of ‘a female’ in Ethiopia are bright coloured clothing, nail polish and long hair styles. When a man is found with these characteristics, he might be categorized as a *setaset*.
2. *Gibre sodom*: means sodomites. It is a Ge’ez term which literally means the practice of sodomites. Sometimes it is also used to denote a person practicing same-sex intercourse. This is the term nearest to “sodomy” in the Amharic language.
3. *Gibre sodomawi*: (plural: *gibre sodomawian*) a Ge’ez term meaning homosexual.
4. *Medarat*: A term that denotes seductive and romantic acts that may include but are not limited to kissing, rubbing and hugging. In Ethiopia, performing seductive and romantic acts that lead to sexual arousal in public places is traditionally considered to be indecent, even for heterosexual couples.
5. *Zega* (plural: *zegoch*) is an Amharic term that literally means “citizen”, but that denotes a same-sex attracted man when it is used by same-sex attracted men themselves.
6. *Kela* (plural: *kelawoch*): men who have sex with men derived this word from another Amharic word, “*kelay*”, which means ‘above’, and use it to refer to the sexual preferences of men who take a penetrating role during sexual intercourse.
7. *Keta* (plural: *ketawoch*) is also derived from *Ketach*, which means ‘bottom’, and refers to the men who are anally-penetrated during sexual intercourse.
8. *Yekela kela* is a term created by *zegoch* to denote the sexual preference and role of the *zega*, who assumes an exclusively top, or penetrative, role.
9. *Yeketa Keta* is also a term created and used by *zegoch* to denote the sexual preference of a *zega* to be exclusively at the bottom (being anally penetrated).
10. *Ket* (plural: *ketoch*) is a direct translation of the English word “straight” (heterosexual) into Amharic and men who have sex with men communicate with it to refer to other men who are not themselves same-sex attracted.
11. *Khat*: It is a plant species commonly chewed in the horn of Africa and in some of the Arab states. It contains substances that make the chewer to feel high and excited. *Khat* is legal in Ethiopia. *Khat* houses are places where many same-sex attracted men meet.

12. *Shisha*: is a form of tobacco smoked in a pipe, especially as mixed with molasses and flavour extracts, which has high stimulant capacities. Owning a *shisha* smoking business is illegal in Ethiopia, but there are a number of such businesses that are in operation and hidden from the police. *Shisha* houses are among the places where same-sex practicing men meet.
13. *Muka*: It is a term used by same-sex attracted men to denote the buttocks.
14. *Ayne tila* is a metaphor in Amharic language and denotes something that prohibits one from doing things of his or her choice. There is an evil spirit named as *ayne tila*, which is believed to prohibit humans from exercising their choice. When *ayne tila* wants to prohibit someone from associating with someone he/she desires, it is believed that the *ayne tila* makes the desired person to dislike that particular person. This applies especially with regard to finding a sexual partner. In this case, *ayne tila* could also have another name- *gergare*, meaning ‘prohibiting’. The term *ayne tila* refers to women when it is used by same-sex attracted men since they consider women as rivals in competing for obtaining men as sexual partners.
15. *Tej*: It is a local wine brewed from honey and *gesho* (*Rhamnus prinoides*) and consumed in Ethiopia. *Tej* is historically linked to a drink for the royal family and it is served during large feasts and holidays in present-day Ethiopia.
16. *Meketeb*- is an Amharic word meaning vaccinated. When used by same-sex attracted men, it refers to the decision of a man to identify himself as same-sex attracted or to join a group or community of same-sex attracted men.
17. *Fetha Negast*: means ‘law of kings’. *Fetha Negast* had been the legal code of Ethiopia until the first written constitution was drafted in 1931. It had a dual system of administration (spiritual and secular) and was adopted from Egypt during the 15th century.
18. *Setegna adari*: means female commercial sex worker
19. *Yefenteta megelbet*: means anal prolapse
20. *Maleslesha*: means lubricant

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In many countries of Africa, same-sex practicing men are described as ‘hidden’ populations. A common interpretation of this is that it is difficult to find ways of engaging with such men, for example, when pursuing HIV-related research and interventions. Despite the fact that a number of HIV-related studies have been conducted worldwide over the past decades, until recently little had been done to study the lives and circumstances of same-sex attracted men in African settings. Recently conducted studies have indicated that the HIV prevalence in many African countries is disproportionately high among men who have sex with men compared to other men, while HIV-related programming targeting such men is generally weak or absent.

Aim: The overall aim of this study was to obtain insight into how same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa experience and live their lives, as well as how such men think about and deal with HIV and health.

Study design: The study employed a combination of qualitative research methods.

Methods: The study’s data was collected through the use of several qualitative research methods – mainly, participant observations, dialogic interviews, group discussions, analysis of media materials and online engagement and interactions.

Findings: Men who have sex with men have been only minimally involved in public health research and interventions in Africa. Amongst the reasons for this is that such men have been regarded as hard-to-reach populations. However, this project found that such men in Addis Ababa were, on a daily basis, spending time with ‘everyone else’ in hotels, restaurants, churches, mosques, cafeterias, cinemas, streets, sporting places and at home. When a person, including a researcher (like me), decides to meet them, he/she *can*, and these men themselves are interested in associating with others.

Same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa have created a subculture of their own, and the social bonds that exist between such men appear to be very strong in many cases. While many men feel happy about the life interactions amongst themselves, many at the same time experience worries and stress because they cannot share the realities of their sexual lives and preferences with their family members.

In addition to unhealthy feelings of worry and stress that might be associated with leading a secret sexual life, other health problems commonly raised in discussions for this study included symptoms of the anal area. Nonetheless, discussions about health more frequently came to focus on structural issues related to health care than physical or mental health problems. The lack of friendly health care for same-sex attracted men and, particularly, the fear and experience of stigma and discrimination in health-care settings, is one of the major obstacles to HIV/AIDS prevention and other health service access.

Conclusion: The study found that men who have sex with men are not, in fact, an unreachable population. Though it might not be possible to say that it is visible to everyone, the findings of this study indicate that same-sex attracted men are rather accessible for public health research efforts and interventions. Despite the presence of a criminalizing law, such men were leading an interactive life amongst themselves and were also connected to the rest of the community in various ways. The perceived stigma and discrimination from the community and health care providers appear to contribute significantly to under-utilisation of preventative and curative health among same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa. An inclusive and participatory public health programme amongst and in partnership with men who have sex with men could be effectively implemented using the already existing, strong networks of such men.

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1 BACKGROUND

It was at Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania where I was first introduced to the field of HIV research and interventions targeting men who have sex with men in Africa and elsewhere in the world. I was attending a course on HIV and most-at-risk populations (MARPs) that was organised by MUHAS in collaboration with the University of Oslo. Attending this short course was an eye opener for me and established the foundations for my future work and research on issues related to HIV and same-sex practicing men.

Prior to this course, I was employed as a behaviour change communication (BCC) program officer for a project working on most-at risk populations (MARPs) at the EngenderHealth office in Ethiopia. The project's primary intention was to tackle HIV-related issues among female commercial sex workers (FSWs) and men who have sex with men (MSM). Yet, the project lacked information about activities that could be carried out, and especially with regard to MSM. As a BCC program officer, I was responsible for developing a sound communication strategy for the target groups specified by the project. However, I had no idea how to develop a strategy that would include and involve men who have sex with men since I had neither been involved in such a project previously nor knew of any such men or their circumstances. Knowing only that such men were categorised as a MARP and in an attempt to thus learn about this group and develop ideas for potential communication strategies, I typed HIV and MARPs into the Google search engine. An announcement for a short course on HIV and MARPs at MUHAS, organized in collaboration with the University of Oslo, was one of the top search results. I applied for the course, was admitted and received financial support to attend it for two weeks in Dar es Salaam.

What I heard from the course instructors and attendees during the first three days was hard to believe. Indeed, the training content had been described in the course announcement and the course schedule was sent to me prior to the commencement of the course. I was comfortable with the set forth course objectives and had even emphasised my interest in MSM in my motivation letter, explaining that I was currently working on a project targeting this particular group. However, I never expected that the issue of homosexuality was to be discussed in as such an open manner.

I had never encountered a single homosexual person prior to this course (as far as I had known) and I did not expect that any homosexual persons would participate in or help facilitate a course like this. I also did not really know much about HIV-related vulnerability among men who have sex with men prior to learning about the situations in different countries, as presented during the course. The first-hand information I obtained during the course about the life and health situations of same-sex attracted men in Africa was new, and was also an incredible experience for me. When I say incredible, it is because of the high prevalence of HIV among men who have sex with men as compared to other men in many African countries: Prevalence rates up to 25 times higher than among men who are not same-sex practicing. In addition to the incredibly high prevalence rates, there was also a daily course programme element called 'the guest of the day'. Every day, at the end of the course programme, same-sex attracted men from Tanzania came to class and shared their life experiences with us, including how they first felt their sexual feelings, how their emotions had developed, the relationships that they had with women and the love and partnership they experienced among men. It was an entirely new experience for me to meet persons who prefer sex only with persons of the same sex and who expresses it in front of a large audience.

I then decided to learn about the Ethiopian situation. I asked the course organisers from the University of Oslo whether it would be possible to conduct research of this kind as part of a master's program in international community health. My next step was to ask if they would be willing to be my research supervisors. After they concurred, my supervisors, Dr. Kåre Moen and Dr. Anne-Lise Middelthon, and I started to develop the topic of this research.

Since I didn't know even a single same-sex attracted person in Ethiopia prior to this, it was not obvious how I would access study participants for a qualitative study among same-sex attracted men. In the course of the discussions between my supervisors and me, it was recommended that I should spend some time in Addis Ababa to find out whether I could manage to meet some same-sex attracted men if I tried to do so. We conceived of this as 'a preliminary assessment' of the situation in the field and the hope was that it would both help generate ideas for the further planning of the study and bring me into contact with some of the men that the project would focus on. We also wanted to explore whether or not the claim that same-sex attracted men are 'hidden populations' that are 'hard to reach' pertained to Ethiopia. The latter objective was

inspired by a report from Dar es Salaam in Tanzania¹ in which my supervisors had found that same-sex attracted men were not really at all difficult to reach for HIV-related research (Moen, Aggleton, Leshabari, & Middelthon, 2012).

1.1 Organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter presents the background of the study, including a discussion of why and how the study was conducted, a brief description of the research objectives, and an overview of the thematic issues relevant to the study's setting in Ethiopia. Chapter two reviews the literature that relates to a consideration of the life and health situations of same-sex attracted men in Ethiopia and elsewhere. This section outlines the global situations of men who have sex with men in relation to their health and, particularly, in terms of HIV. This chapter also discusses the ways in which sub-Saharan and east African countries have experienced and dealt with the issue of same-sex attraction, as well as the historical perspectives on such men in Ethiopia. .

Chapter three discusses the methods and materials employed in the study. This section explains how the study was designed and how the data was gathered and analyzed, as well as the ethical clearance procedures that applied to this research. Chapter four gives a description of the journey undertaken in the search for men who have sex with men and the ways in which such men could be contacted. Chapter five describes, in detail, zega life in Addis Ababa, with zega life being the life of same-sex attracted men as experienced and performed by such men themselves. Chapter six describes the health and HIV understandings and experiences of men who are attracted to men. Their performance of a healthy life and the ways in which they deal with and respond to HIV are presented in this chapter. Chapter seven is the concluding chapter and it is in this chapter that the major findings of the study are discussed and summarized.

¹ The report claims that reaching can be determined merely by the one to reach's "decision to perform an act of reaching" and "act in a way", and that this can be described as the performance of certain ways of establishing contact with another person.

1.2 Objectives of the study

1.2.1 General objective

The overall aim of the study was to obtain insight into how same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa experience and live their lives and to learn about how such men think about and deal with HIV and health.

1.2.2 Specific objectives

- To acquire insight into how to establish contacts with men who have sex with men in Addis Ababa and to determine the extent to which such men are hidden and difficult to reach for public health research and programming
- To generate insight into the lives of same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa as seen, experienced and performed by such men themselves
- To generate insight into how same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa think about and deal with HIV, as well as their experience and performance of a healthy life.

1.3 Thematic research fields

1.3.1 Establishing contacts

The collection of studies reporting that establishing contact with same-sex attracted men for research and intervention purposes was difficult did concern us, even though we were not necessarily convinced. Thus, establishing contact with such men became the first task and objective of this study. In addition to establishing contact with same-sex attracted men, this study also tried to increase understanding of how such men could be contacted for relevant public health research and intervention efforts.

1.3.2 The life circumstances of same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa

This study attempted to understand the life-worlds of same-sex attracted men in Ethiopia, as experienced and performed by such men themselves. This objective was derived from the point of view that proper understanding of what the world looks and feels like from the perspective of same-sex attracted men is crucial when planning for and implementing health-related interventions that include and involve these men.

There had been a lack of insight into the ways in which same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa see themselves, live their lives and experience their everyday activities and contexts. Under this particular objective, the following research questions were pursued. In what ways are these lives different from and similar to other men's lives in Ethiopia's capital city? What are the joys, thrills, and excitements of these life-worlds? What are the challenges, problems and difficulties that they experience? How do same-sex practicing men understand themselves and how do they experience the perceptions and understandings that others have about them? How do people think about and experience attraction, love, sex and relationships? What characterizes the relationships that same-sex attracted men find beautiful and attractive? What are the problems that these men potentially face when they are in relations with other men? This study tried to gain an understanding of these and similar questions.

1.3.3 Understanding and experience of health and HIV related issues

1.3.3.1 Issues related to health

The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of diseases”. This may, at times, be a useful definition for health workers and planners, but how does it compare with how same-sex practicing men think about and understand ‘health’ themselves? What do they take ‘health’ to mean? How do they explain a healthy life? How do they feel and act when they perceive themselves as healthy? What kinds of things do they perceive as negative and positive influences on their health? Are there some health challenges that are particular to same-sex attracted men? Which ones?

1.3.3.2 Issues related to HIV

Globally, same-sex attracted men are at increased risk of HIV infection when compared to men who are not themselves same-sex attracted. HIV in Ethiopia has been an issue of public health importance for about two decades. However, the country has not yet developed any HIV and AIDS programming that includes and involves same-sex attracted men. Relatively little, moreover, is known about how same-sex attracted men feel about, or how they think about, talk about and act in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Understanding how HIV is understood and experienced by same-sex practicing men might serve as a foundation to plan and implement inclusive HIV programming that embraces and involves same sex attracted men in Ethiopia.

This study, therefore, attempted to address questions such as: How do same-sex attracted men understand HIV/AIDS? Do they perceive themselves vulnerable to HIV? How and why? In what ways is it or is it not an issue of priority and importance in their lives? What are perceived as HIV-related risks? What do same-sex attracted men do to protect themselves and others from infection? What does ‘living with HIV’ mean for same-sex attracted men? How do they see HIV/AIDS-related services? What is the significance of HIV testing? How important is ART and its impact on sexual behaviour?

1.4 Country profile: Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations of the world. It is located in the horn of Africa and has its own alphabet. It has been identified as one of the cradles of mankind, particularly since the discovery of “Lucy” and “Ardi” – the most complete skeleton ever discovered and the oldest female skeleton, respectively (Turism, 2012). Ethiopia is a country with an intense diversity of nationalities, peoples and linguistic groups, and its peoples altogether speak over 80 languages. It is also one of the most populous nations in Africa, next to Nigeria and Egypt (Turism, 2012)., Ethiopia has a population of 74 million (CSA, 2007), out of which 60% are Christians, 35% are Muslims and the rest maintain other religious backgrounds. Ethiopia accepted Christianity in the 4th century (EOC, 2012). Until 1974, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) and the Ethiopian state administration had been united and the law of the country had been coined by church scholars (Info, 2012). While the first modern school in Ethiopia was opened in the 20th century, the first codified law of the country was coined in the 15th century by the EOC scholars. In the 15th century, Ethiopia adopted *Fetha Negast* (the ‘law of the kings’, which has both secular and spiritual parts) from Egypt and the law had served the country until the first written constitution was drafted in 1931 (Info, 2012). Currently, the country maintains a federal structure with nine regional states – Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somalia, Gambella, Benshangul Gumuz, Harari and the southern nations, nationalities and peoples – and two administrative city councils, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa.

1.4.1 Population and health policy

Ethiopia has conducted three population censuses thus far, in 1984, 1994 and 2007. According to the 2007 census, Ethiopia had a population of 72 million, out of whom 85% lived in rural areas with economies dependent on agriculture. The first health policy of Ethiopia, which focused only

on communicable diseases, was drafted in early 1960s. Later, in 1991, the current health policy was drafted and includes a directive called a health systems development program (HSDP) that is revised every five years. According to the 2011 health and demographic survey (CSA, 2011), the national HIV prevalence estimate was found to be much lower than the 2005 estimate – whereas it was 2.4% in 2005, it was 1.5% in 2011. The urban HIV prevalence also showed a significant decrease, from 7.8% in 2005 to 4.2% in 2011. In the country-wide estimate, men had a prevalence of approximately 1% and women had a prevalence of approximately 1.9%, whereas the urban estimates were 2.9% and 5.2%, respectively.

1.4.2 Law related to homosexual practices in Ethiopia

Homosexual practices are punishable by law in Ethiopia. Both in the 1957 penal code and in the newly revised criminal code, homosexual practices are regarded as “indecent acts” and punishable by imprisonment. Article 629 of the federal criminal code of Ethiopia states that whoever performs a homosexual act, or any other indecent act with another person of the same sex, is punishable with ‘simple imprisonment’, whereas Article 630 (b) prescribes “rigorous...imprisonment not less than 10 years where the person makes a profession of such activities...” (Ethiopia, 2004).

Addis Ababa city, the study site for this project and a 126 year-old city, was founded in 1886 by Emperor Menelik and Empress Taitu. Addis is the capital of the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia and the headquarters of the African union. In the 2010 projection, Addis had 2.7 million inhabitants. It is also the largest commercial centre of Ethiopia.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The social construction of sexuality and same-sex relations

Anthropologist Gilbert Herdt (1997, p. 2) has described how sexuality, like other matters, may be subject to societal ‘laws’ and ‘rules’. Those who feel and act differently from the majority have frequently been considered to go ‘against the grain of the culture’ and, as a result, their mere existence, feelings, desires and aspirations have often not been considered positively by the rest of the society. This has made it difficult for gays and lesbians many places in the world to “come out” in the public and be open about their sexual preferences. These social circumstances are now changing many places, with relatively fast changes in some parts of the world and slow or no change in other places.

John D’Emilio, a US historian, has described the ‘emergence of gay identities and subcultures’ in the United States in the 1970s (Abelove & Barale, 1993) when ‘many lesbians and gays came out in public as a result of a relative sexual liberalization’ and the ‘repeal of sodomy laws in half of the states, [and] a partial lifting of exclusion of lesbian and gay men from federal employment (p. 467) were among the major successes of gays and lesbians. Moreover, homosexuality had long been considered a psychiatric disorder and ‘the elimination of homosexuality from the psychiatric profession’s list of mental illnesses’ (P. 467) was another major achievement of the homosexual movement in the 1970s in the US and across Europe.

From the 1980s, public health activists started working together with gay rights activists due to the emergence of HIV in much of the western world. On the African continent, however, similar changes did not occur at the same point in time. According to Smith et al (2009, p. 420),

In the early 1980s, silence equals death became a rallying cry for MSM activists in the USA to draw attention to a frightening new disease that was largely ignored or denied by government officials and the general public. Nearly three decades later in sub-Saharan African the silence remains, driven by cultural, religious, and political unwillingness to accept MSM as equal members of society. And the effect of silence is the same; the continued denial of MSM from effective HIV/AIDS prevention and care is harmful to national HIV/AIDS responses, the consequence of which is borne not only by MSM, but by everyone. The challenge now is to break that silence, recognize the problem, and begin to move forward in the development and implementation of the prevention and care programmes that are so urgently needed

2.2 Discourses in African homosexuality

There has been a long-standing reluctance to acknowledge or accept the existence of homosexuality in Africa. Nowadays, homosexuality is better accepted and integrated in the social and legal systems of the Western nations than in Africa (Francis, 2002; Reddy, 2001), where there are notable debates and discourses about the legal and social issues of accepting homosexuality. Even if such claims of non-existence are not as popular as before, these days, there is still an argument put forth by some groups of people in Africa that homosexuality is not African but is, instead, brought from a foreign culture and, particularly, that of the West.

Those who argue that homosexuality is ‘un-African’ denote homosexuality as a ‘white man’s disease’ and use the colonial periods to justify their claim that homosexuality was introduced by Westerners during times of colonization (Phillips, 1997). African churches have also played a crucial role in preaching against homosexual practices and relating to homosexuality as ‘unnatural’ and ‘un-African’. Marc Epprecht (2008, p. 119), in his book *Unspoken Facts: A History of Homosexualities in Africa* (p: 119), indicated that the declining interest of African churches to teach about heterosexuality as opposed to homosexuality, as well as lacking state interest in prosecuting homosexuals, contributed to the emergence of gay subcultures in southern Africa.

The British Broadcasting Agency (BBC), in its world debate program, recently hosted a debate on the theme “Is Homosexuality Un-African?” in March 2011, providing a good indication of how people formulate their arguments in defence of the idea that homosexuality is ‘un-African’ (BBC, 2011). In this televised debate, one of the debaters was David Bahati, a Ugandan MP who drafted the 2009 Anti-Homosexuality Bill for the Ugandan parliament. During this debate, he was defending the view that homosexuality is un-African and merely imported from the West. The former president of Botswana, Festus Mogae, was another debater on the same day. However, Mogae was arguing in favour of decriminalizing homosexuality, explaining that “homosexuality should be decriminalized to help tackle HIV rates”. Furthermore, David Bahati, in his televised interview with The Rachel Maddox Show on December 8, 2010, went as far as to say that “\$15 million is budgeted to recruit Ugandan children into homosexuality and a video was circulated in Uganda stating that male-to-male sex is okay” (Maddox, 2010).

2.3 The public health discourses of men who have sex with men: sub-Saharan Africa

Globally, the prevalence of HIV is disproportionately higher among men who have sex with men than in the general population. Also in low and middle income countries same-sex practising men have a greater risk of HIV infection than that which pertains to the general population. Yet, UNAIDS reports that the health service coverage for same-sex attracted men has been very low; only 12% of same-sex practicing men had been getting HIV related services in Africa until 2005 (UNAIDS, 2009). The same report also showed that less than 5% of the total HIV/AIDS budget globally goes to addressing HIV/AIDS issue among men who have sex with men.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a region which has been severely hit by the HIV epidemic for more than two decades, and more than two thirds of people who live with HIV globally are found in this region. Many countries of the region criminalize same-sex practices, and HIV prevention work targeting men who have sex with men in this region is either insignificant or absent. Furthermore, same-sex attracted men in Sub-Saharan Africa have not been on the research agenda, and hence only very little is known about their life and health circumstances. In the countries of Southern and Eastern Africa where HIV seropositivity studies have been conducted, the prevalence of HIV among same-sex practicing men has been found to be disproportionately higher than the prevalence of HIV among all men in the respective countries (UNAIDS 2009). UNAIDS also emphasises that some men who have sex with men also have sex with women, and that the transmission of HIV therefore is interlinked between men who have sex with men and the rest of the population (amfar 2008; UNIDS 2009). According to the report, in low-income countries 20% of same-sex practising men report having had sex with women at some point in time, 16% of same-sex attracted men report having had sex with women in the last year; and 16% of same-sex attracted men report being married to a woman. In certain African countries where seropositivity studies have been conducted, for example in Zambia, Malawi and Kenya, the prevalence of HIV among men who have sex with men has been compared to the national average HIV prevalence rates. It was found to be 32.9% among MSM in Zambia (while the national adult HIV prevalence was 15.72%), 21.4% in Malawi (11.46%) and 15.6% in Kenya (7.49%) (Baral, Dausab, Masenior, Iipinge, & Beyrer, 2008).

2.4 Historical perspective: Ethiopia

As far as I have been able to establish, there had not been any study conducted in Ethiopia on issues related to homosexuality before the 20th century. Murray and Roscoe (2001) have reviewed previous work (including publications in Italian and German). In their review, the oldest mentioned study is a report by the Italian Paolo Ambrogetti who in 1900 wrote about age-based homosexual relationships between Eritrean boys and what he called *diavoletti* (little devils) (Ambrogetti, 1900; Murray & Roscoe, 2001). Such relationships were performed quite openly and were tolerated by the boys' fathers since they represented a source of income. Ambrogetti also reported that while the Eritrean boys having relations with *diavoletti*, they gradually began to have relations with females. But *diavoletti* might continue having relations with boys until the age of twenty.

In 1909, Friedrich J. Bieber (a German) did fieldwork in the Eastern part of Ethiopia, in the agrarian community of Harari. He reported that, “[s]odomy is not foreign for Harari” and Murray and Roscoe (2001) point out that the relationships he mentioned were not strictly based on age or gender differences. Bieber also described male same-sex practices in nearby Oromo and Somali pastoralists (Murray and Roscoe 2001 p. 22).

American anthropologist Simon Messing (1957, p. 551) conducted fieldwork among the Amhara people in the northern part of Ethiopia in the 1960s and found men referred to as *wanda-warad*² (a term literally meaning a ‘male-female’) who were accepted but reportedly viewed as “god’s mistakes”. According to Messing such men were considered as defective and he described them as persons who,

live as individuals, not forming a society of their own, for they are tolerated. Only their kinfolk are ashamed of them, so they live in another province. Women tolerate a transvestite “like a brother”; men are not jealous of him even when he spends all his time with the womenfolk. Often the transvestite is an unusually sensitive person, quick to anger, but intense in his personal likings, sensitive to cultural diffusions from the outside world, especially those carried by Arab traders; and Muslim Arab traders are often the only male contacts he tolerates.

² *Wanda-warad* in Messing book is literally translated as male-female but at the moment men with the characteristics Messing referred are called *setaset* literally means feminine.

In the mid-1960s, Canadian Anthropologist Christopher Hallpike did extensive fieldwork in southern Ethiopia, particularly in the Konso area. During his work, Hallpike (Hallpike, 1972) encountered a man who was a Sagoda (effeminate person) in Konso village (1972, p. 151). Murray and Roscoe quote the following from Hallpike's report,

Men who actually wear skirts are very few, and those who do are clearly incapable of acting as men. I knew one in Gaho, who earned his living curing skins, a female occupation. He was very effeminate in voice and manner. . . . I was told that sagoda liked to play the passive role in sodomy, and the description I was given of the manner in which a sagoda would induce a man to perform this upon him in the night was so detailed that it could not have been invented. The question is whether normal men only practice sodomy with sagoda or among themselves. I am strongly inclined to think it is not confined to relations with sagoda.

Frederic Gamst (1969) reported homosexual relations among shepherd boys in the central part of Ethiopia (Gamst, 1969) and in 1975, another anthropologist, Donald L. Donham reported that he was told by his study participants about the presence of a category of effeminate men, *ashtime*, in the Maale community in the southern part of Ethiopia (Donham, 1985). Donham met and interviewed an *ashtime*. He described this category as men who "dressed like women, performed female tasks, cared for their own houses and apparently have sex with men" and his informants told him about the presence of such men in the Maale tribe. They were also referred to as *wobo* (which means "crooked") and an *ashtime* complained of not being "neither man nor woman" during his interview with Donham.

Donham (1999) had a chance to return to Maale community for further anthropological work in the beginning of the 1990s and again met with *ashtime* men (whom he described as biological males who perform female roles).

In 1970s, almost at the same time as Donham did his first anthropological work in southern Ethiopia, another study was going in the western part of the country MacDermot (1972, p. 99) and was reported that homosexuality was not talked about in Nuer community in Gambella,

It surprised me to find that in an almost totally naked society, homosexuality was never discussed. "It is a bad thing like death. We do not talk about it," they said. The penalty for a homosexual could indeed be death, for the act is thought of as a degrading Arab insult (P.99).

2.5 Recent literature on homosexuality in Ethiopia

None of the mentioned studies from the 20th century were conducted to specifically address homosexuality as a topic. The emergence of HIV and several reported cases of raped boys in Ethiopia were the causes to start research that targeted male to male sex. .

Getnet Tadele was the first to engage extensively in research on same-sex relations and on sexual abuse of boys among male street children in Addis Ababa and elsewhere in Ethiopia. In his first two publications (Tadele, 2003, 2004) he reported that male street children in Dessie and Addis Ababa had heard of homosexuals (both gays and lesbians) and homosexual practices although they said that they had never met someone engaging in such practices. In his book, called 'Bleak Prospects, young men, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia', Tadele (2006, p. 134) reported that school pupils revealed that they knew of homosexual practices in Dessie. While some of his street youth participants claimed that homosexual sex was practiced only for the sake of money and at times rape, 17 out of 30 participants from schools responded 'agree' to the statement "Homosexual practices hardly occur among young people in Dessie." (P.146). Tadele reported that despite many admitting the existence of homosexual practice; they described it as part of 'abnormal' sexual behaviour.

For many young people involved in the study, a "normal sexual citizen" is the one who refrains from anal/oral sex, homosexuality, and "unusual" sexual positions. In other words, a 'normal' sexual citizen is a heterosexual who sticks to the conventional sexual positions and practices. (P. 234).

In another article, Tadele (2009, p. 179) on unrecognized victims of male sexual abuse in Addis Ababa, Getnet reflected on possible causes for sexual abuse and rape of male children in Addis Ababa in the following way:

Since homosexuality in Ethiopia is culturally and religiously condemned illegal practice, there seems to be a strong resistance and low acceptance among the society, even though, the practice is spreading underground. This would mean that homosexuals often find it difficult to approach adults for fear of the presumed resistance. As a result, they resort to children who are not physically and mentally strong to fight back abusers.

In two more recent articles by Tadele (2010, 2011), the focus is exclusively on homosexual practices; one paper deals with 'sexual safety' and HIV/AIDS among men who have sex with men and the other with masculinity among men who have sex with men. The first-mentioned of these papers presents misconceptions about HIV transmission and prevention, while the second

concludes that “Heteronormativity or the expectations of parents, community and society at large is far more influential on the sexuality of men who have sex with men than their own individual desires and needs.”(2011, p. 457)

Another person who has done research on issues related to homosexuality in Ethiopia is Seifu Hagos Gebreyesus. He did his master’s thesis (Seifu Hagos Gebreyesus, 2006) and later published an article (S.H. Gebreyesus & Mariam, 2009) with Damen Haile Mariam on HIV/AIDS risks among men who have sex with men in Addis Ababa. Gebreyesus and Mariam (2009, p. 276) reported that it was difficult for same-sex practicing men to find partners due to fear of the social and legal consequences that might follow as a result of being identified as homosexual.

We learned about sexual assault on children and non-gay individuals. These assaults are usually committed by covert homosexuals and the elderly, following drug use.

And in the same report (p.275), they reported that:

Almost all have misconceptions, as they consider homosexual acts to be protective compared with heterosexual acts. Some are unaware that HIV risks are linked to their homosexual lifestyle.

Homosexuality in Addis seems to have increased without being noticed. That homosexual acts are illegal and culturally stigmatized may have contributed to it being practiced covertly. As some MSM are bisexual, engaging in heterosexual intercourse, there may be cross bridging of the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. (p. 277)

A graduate student named Daniel Ibbo Balcha³ from the University of Lund, Sweden conducted a study (media discourse analysis and interviews) as part of his master’s thesis with an aim to understand the concept and construction of homosexuality in Ethiopia (Balcha, 2009). He reported that “Homosexuality is the least understood subject because it is mostly viewed as only men’s behaviour or disease, which is contagious due to association.” (p. 2). Daniel also commented on the role of the media and the church in portraying homosexuality (negatively) in the public, “The media and the elite has been creating homophobia in discourse and linguistic terms.” (p. 2)

³ Daniel reported in his thesis that he used media discourse analysis and interviews with Ethiopian immigrants in Sweden as a result of being evacuated from Ethiopia (only after 9 days stay) by the police for being suspected “promoting the western culture” while he was doing his fieldwork. However, my study participants’ perception about police on similar issues seems different from what he reportedly faced in Addis and hence this issue will further be discussed in later sections of the thesis.

In 2007, a book was authored by Archbishop Abba Samuel (2007), the Archbishop of Addis Ababa Diocese and an Assistant to His Holiness the Patriarch of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church about homosexuality. The 144-page book, which is written in English language and entitled '*Sodomites and the wage of sin*', discusses homosexuality from a Christian perspective. Abba Samuel presents claims made by homosexuals for homosexuality to be accepted as a sexual behaviour, and discussed each one of these based on the Old and New Testament. He concluded that homosexual practices are sinful and condemned practices in the Christian doctrine.

In 2011, another book was authored by a pen name Fares (2011) in Amharic based on what he claimed to be a true story about an ex-homosexual man. The 246-page book tells the story of the 36 years old Abiy who was raped at the age of six by a 14 year old son of his brother's godfather in rural Ethiopia (p. 18-19), later going on to have receptive anal sex with other boys in different rural parts of Ethiopia (p. 47), and then joining a group of homosexual men in Addis Ababa (p. 159-183). He spent 16 years in Addis Ababa as a homosexual man before but now Abiy claims that he is no longer a homosexual. He became HIV positive while he was leading a homosexual life and afterwards, he claimed that he stopped to have a male to male sex. The publication of the book which tells a lot about homosexual life in Ethiopia was blamed by many people in fear of its potential to promote homosexual practices. However, the author of the book claimed that the objective of his book "was not to promote homosexuality but to expose it", when he was interviewed by an Ethiopian online portal (Ezega, 2011).

In recent years, two anti-homosexual organizations (United for Life Ethiopia and Association of Anti-homosexual Movements) have been in the news regarding their work fighting against what they call 'the covert expansion of homosexuality in Ethiopia'. The former is a religious affiliated non-governmental local organization engaged in both "healing services through counselling and prayers" (Ezega, 2012) and coordinating with the religious forums in Ethiopia for a constitutional ban of homosexuality in the country (homosexuality is criminalized in the penal code of Ethiopia but not banned in the constitution). So far, United for Life has organized two large national conferences (in 2008 and 2012) among leaders of four religions in Ethiopia (the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, the Ethiopian Catholic Church and the Ethiopian Islamic council) together with political leaders and prominent

personalities. The religious leaders have condemned homosexuality and called upon the government to ban homosexuality in the constitution (AFP, 2008). The organization also produced a video documentary that was uploaded on community video sites so that as many people as possible could watch the resolution of their conference (Life, 2007).

The Association of Anti-homosexual Movements in Ethiopia is a locally registered organization that has been in the news through its chairman who claimed that he led the establishment of this association after spending 10 years in the Western world where he saw “the moral crisis of nations due to legalizing homosexuality” (Moges, 2011).

Over the last few years, magazines and newspapers have also been covering issues related to homosexuality in Ethiopia, and many such publications since 2008 were collected in connection with this study.

The 16th International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) was held in Addis Ababa from 4-8 December 2011. When it was reported about a preconference to be organized by a coalition called African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMShER) for about 200 homosexuals, an unprecedented public condemnation followed (VOA, 2011). In response to the announcement of what was referred to as a gay preconference, the forum for religious leaders in collaboration with United for Life Ethiopia and the Association of Anti-homosexual Movements in Ethiopia called a press conference to condemn the preconference. However, the press release was cancelled after an hour long meeting with the health minister of the country a short while before the release was planned (Capital, 2011; Teweldebirhan, 2011). The meeting was not open for journalists and anyone else and the discussion agenda and discussion was not told to the media. Massive condemnations and homophobic statements from the different groups of the community in the capital Addis Ababa started to emerge following reports about the cancellation of the press release (Admas, 2011; Fete, 2011; Inq, 2011; Lia, 2011; VOA, 2011).

Pew Research Centre conducted a global attitudes survey in 2007 by which Ethiopia was among the countries included in the survey and 97% of the survey population of Ethiopia responded “Yes” to a statement; “Homosexuality is a way of life that society should not accept” (PewResearchCenter, 2007).

3 METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employed a combination of qualitative research methods. The design of this study was inspired by Sandelowski's (2010) work on qualitative description as "a vehicle for presenting and treating research methods as living entities that resist simple classification." Thus, since very little was known about the lives of men who have sex with men in Addis Ababa and their experiences of health and HIV, the study was aimed at providing a qualitative, descriptive account of the lives and circumstances of such men.

A set of complementary qualitative methods were used to produce data for this study. These methods included the following: (1) participant observation, (2) dialogic interviews, (3) group discussions (4) analysis of media materials and (5) online engagement and interaction.

Since the start of the project and through the end, this study has passed through three important time periods and research phases. The first was the preliminary feasibility study that was carried out in December 2010. This preliminary assessment was undertaken in order to make sure that the study would be feasible in terms of ability to contact same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa. The feasibility study was conducted for two weeks, during the break between my first and second semesters, and it established that it was possible to contact and engage with same-sex attracted men in Addis. The protocol for this study was written and defended upon my return. Importantly, while I was in Oslo and attending my second semester courses, I maintained communication with the men who I had contacted during the preliminary assessment through email and telephone correspondence.

The second time period took place after I had completed my second semester, from July to November 2011. During this time, I had returned to Addis Ababa to begin my fieldwork. To obtain the final ethical approval, however, took longer than anticipated and I was hence forced to postpone the onset of my formal data collection. Nonetheless, during this time, I met with the men with whom I had established contact during the preliminary study. They also introduced me to many of their friends and I spent time with them throughout their daily lives, just like any other friend does. In the meantime, they assisted me in planning for the formal data collection period.

The third time period, then, was the time during which the official data collection took place. From December 2011 to February 2012, the main fieldwork was conducted and the bulk of the empirical data gathered. The preparatory work had been carried out during the two previous time periods and this work had included the establishment of contacts and a good level of trust and friendship amongst these men which, ultimately, enabled the discussion of private issues and facilitated the data production during this phase. During this period, I met and interacted with more than 100 men throughout a variety of participant observations. Ten men took part in repeated interviewing (4-5 times each) and, altogether, 43 interviews were conducted. Twenty group discussions were also conducted.

Below, I discuss, separately, the different methods used during the main fieldwork period.

3.1 Participant observation

In the beginning of the actual fieldwork, the events I attended were limited. When participants established more closeness and trust with me after the first and second interviews, they started to invite me to different settings to be with them and part of their program. My interaction with same-sex attracted men continued in a participatory way and throughout a range of activities and occasions in which such men lead their daily lives. The range of activities and occasions I was involved in and invited to includes, but was not limited to, birthday parties, occasional parties, one-on-one or small group hangouts, *shisha*⁴ and *khat*⁵ house celebrations, cinema, gymnasium, bath centres, hotels, night clubs, cafeterias, private houses, holiday celebrations and offices

Attending those routine daily life activities and events helped me to gain understandings about individual, group and interpersonal dimensions of how men who have sex with men interact with each other, what their relationships with the rest of the community are, what things they do individually and in groups, and where they spend their time. Marshal and Rossman (2010) describe participant observation as “immersion in the setting of participants” I was able to take part in their daily lives and see the types of life-styles that such men in Addis have, especially in

⁴ *Shisha* is a form of tobacco smoked in a pipe, especially as mixed with molasses and flavour extracts, which has high stimulant capacities. Owning a *shisha* smoking business is illegal in Ethiopia but there are a number of such businesses running, though hidden, from the police

⁵ *Khat* is a plant species commonly chewed on the horn of Africa. It contains an alkaloid called cathinone, an amphetamine-like stimulant which is said to cause excitement. *Khat* is legal in Ethiopia

terms of their similarities to and differences from men who are not themselves same-sex attracted.

In big parties, which were organized by a group of men who have sex with men, I always met some guests who I did not previously know. Nonetheless, getting to know each other on the same day was not difficult for me since many of them were so keen to meet new friends on such occasions. But, in some circumstances, it was not possible to know all who were attending the parties due to the large number of new people who were invited. Since such parties were organized by and for men who have sex with men, there were certain situations in which some of the new-comers did not know that I was a researcher. With regard to a birthday party, for example, the invitation for me did not come with the authorization of all invited men, as I was invited either by the host of the party or a close friend. In situations where there were participants who were not pre-informed about the presence of a researcher in their party, for example, I was also tasked to make a balance between maintaining the formal ethical standards and the practical situations out in the field.

When I was regularly invited to participate in events and activities organized by a participant or participants, taking part in those occasions were engaging and participatory. However, at the same time, I wanted to have a certain professional distance from my participants to conduct the observation work and recording what I had observed. As Fetterman (2010, p. 36) explains, the “maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data” is important, as a researcher should have adequate distance from the participants to conduct observations and to record what he/she observed. Though it was a bit challenging to establish such a demarcation, I had managed to independently observe the life-styles, interactions and activities of my participants and made proper notes.

The number of men who have sex with men whom I interacted with during my participant observation sessions was sometimes high and sometimes low, depending on the type of event. Overall, over 100 men who have sex with men were part of the participant observations that took place during the fieldwork period.

3.2 Dialogical interviews

The dialogic interview, also referred to as the reflexive interview (Denzin, 2001), is an interactive approach to exploring information in a flexible way that creates a balance of participation in discussion between the researcher and the participants. It has the advantage of establishing a natural environment in which the participants also find ways to research the researcher during the dialogue. Study themes and questions are not limited to topics pre-designated by the researcher. Rather, since there is a dialogue between the researcher and the participants, there is an opportunity for the researcher to learn of new topics and dimensions from the participants that he/she can then go on to ask and reflect about.

Since sex and sexuality are issues of relative secrecy in the Ethiopian society, obtaining relevant answers in a one-time interview was difficult and, typically, doing so only became possible after establishing a certain level of closeness and reputation with participants. Thus, though it was not common to achieve open dialogues in the first or second interviews and conversations, increasing levels of openness was observed while we met more times and engaged in more conversations.

A question guide for this project was designed to address issues related to participants' perceptions about their life, their challenges in life and their feelings, experiences and health circumstances (see Appendix 1). The dialogue often resembled an informal discussion between the study participant and myself and took place in a controlled environment in which we were the only persons engaged in our conversation. I did use the guide, which was initially developed in accordance with major thematic issues, but there were also many circumstances in which a participant directed the interview in a way different from what I had initially anticipated but nonetheless important for the discussion. Participants also asked me questions similar to the ones I was asking them during our talks.

Because the first entrance to the study community was made months before the actual study began, selection of the study participants was made using the existing contacts. One of the challenges in such purposive sampling is the issue of diversity among participants. Diversity among participants for this study was considered in terms of age, socioeconomic backgrounds, education and employment status. All together forty three interviews were conducted with ten men who were interviewed from three to five times each during the three months period.

3.3 Group discussions

Group discussion was not listed as a method when I submitted my study protocol and I had not even considered it in the beginning of the study. However, it was found to be an important method for capturing more information during the fieldwork, particularly when I was regularly invited to join meetings of men in small groups. Friends were meeting in small gatherings for different purposes, such as for chatting, sporting events, occasional visits to certain hotels and restaurants, smoking *shisha* (see footnote 4), chewing *khat* (see footnote 5), celebrating holidays, drinking, eating and other similar activities. The main supervisor, Dr. Kåre Moen, had visited the fieldwork site in Addis Ababa and was able to attend some discussions and conversations with same-sex practicing men at their gatherings, both in private house settings and in bars. During Dr. Kåre's stay, we made important fieldwork and data production improvements. Among other things, group discussion was decided to be employed as a data production technique after Dr. Kåre realized that important issues were raised among small groups and that such discussions could be relevant sources of information for the study.

Those who met in small groups for such occasions were mostly known to each other and were comfortable and equal in their discussions of issues. A member in such a small group feels that he has a share in the discussion and this enhances participation as well as the possibility of being open when discussing issues related to same-sex practices from the point of view of individuals, groups or communities of same-sex attraction. In such a small group, members did not usually regard me as an external person; rather, I was also seen as a member of the group.

The discussion style was not strictly focussed in terms of what we call focus group discussions (FGD). The discussions did not have a leader and that gave an opportunity for everyone to participate freely without being manipulated to follow certain directions. Since I was also regarded as a member of the group, I had the opportunity to guide the discussion in ways meaningful and relevant to the study objectives. This means that I was able to raise issues to be discussed in the group, in addition to the issues that are raised by other members of the group.

Topics that I was interested in gaining a group perspective on were asked during the discussion and I recorded notes when discussions were underway. I attended 20 such small group discussions over the three months period.

3.4 Analysis of media materials

During the last six to seven years, issues related to homosexual practices in Ethiopia have been addressed by different individuals and groups. The Ethiopian religious forum, local and international news agencies, and some anti-homosexual organizations in Ethiopia have been among the entities that have been bringing the issue of homosexuality into the sphere of public discussion using the print media.

Such engagement of the media to report about homosexual practices in Ethiopia particularly started since 2008 after the ever largest national conference organized by the forum for religious leaders to condemn homosexuality (AFP, 2008). To maintain a current understanding of these matters which have been brought into the public, while in Addis Ababa I followed closely, and gathered, printed media such as brochures, newspapers, magazines and books written about same-sex practicing men (in Amharic and English) in Ethiopia. Newspaper articles which were published since 2008, after the conference which was organized in the capital to condemn homosexual practices (see 2.5 above), were collected from archives of respective newspapers and reviewed. Many newspapers' editions in Addis are on weekly basis and hence collection and review of newspapers during the fieldwork were also done on a daily basis depending on what newspaper was released on a particular day. Collection and review of magazines were done on a monthly basis since several magazines' editions were once in a month. Brochures and books were collected and reviewed once during the fieldwork.

3.5 Online materials and interactions

Men who have sex with men have different web- based communication channels to maintain existing friendship and to make new friends through communication online. A lot of interactions are being made online using social media sites such as Facebook fun pages, Yahoo groups, blogs and same-sex affiliated websites. Some of the participants were initially contacted to involve in this study through their participation in such online interactions. Some of such online communication platforms had administrators who routinely give permission who could get access to membership in the online platform and who cannot; I was given permission as a researcher to be a member of some of the online platforms on which only same-sex attracted men are interacting.

Daily online interactions, news releases, discussions and announcements on online sources were routinely followed and analysed to be inputs for this study. Information pertaining to same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa from other online media was collected and reviewed as source of data for this study. Online data collection was done through routinely following blog postings, discussion agendas and news release pertaining to same-sex attracted men throughout the fieldwork.

3.6 Analysis of data material

All interviews and discussions were conducted in Amharic (my mother tongue and the official language of Ethiopia). Notes from interviews, discussions, experiences, events, online interactions and observations were handwritten during or soon after each event. Short notes were taken during or immediately after the events and, afterwards, these notes were expanded. This was normally done on the following night or day, and sometimes within two days. During the weekends, there were often several occasions that I attended, and expanding on the notes was often not possible on the same day.

The short notes that were taken during or immediately after events were sometimes written in Amharic and sometimes in English. English was used later when the notes were expanded. Time spent with participants and while reviewing the interviews after writing them up was important for the development and pursuit of new questions and reflections.

The interviews, discussions, observations and events that took place during the fieldwork phase were regularly shared with my supervisors for ongoing discussion, analysis and reflection. As content analysis is described by Miles and Haberman (1994), the entire collection of data material was read over and over again in an attempt to understand the data in its entirety, and the data was then manually coded with brief verbal descriptions. The data was sorted to identify themes and their sequences, and this process was accompanied by further analysis to produce subthemes. Finally, extracted themes and sub-themes were reported in this thesis as an overall reflection on the study.

3.7 Ethical consideration

Research ethical clearance applications were submitted to the Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research Ethics (REK), Norway and to the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the

Faculty of Medicine, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. The study has been cleared from both ethical clearance approving bodies.

3.7.1 Informed consent

Ethical issues were among ongoing concerns to me how to make a balance between practical issues facing me out in the field, on the one hand, and the formal ethical principles on the other hand. During interviews and discussions such issues were not as such challenging but during observations of daily lives, there were times that needed me to be always curious not to intrude participants privacy and not to miss important real life scenarios while I was trying to keep formal ethical principles. In doing so, obtaining informed and voluntary consent from study participants was amongst the most important ethical principles of this study and informed consent was obtained in a manner so that all study participants were provided with an oral briefing about the research project, followed by detailed information pertaining to the entire research process unless observation was not in public places. Following the oral briefing and providing a written information sheet about the study (see Appendix 2); consents were obtained orally since written consent could potentially create frustration to participate in such a research where homosexual practice is criminalized.

3.7.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

All information pertaining to this study was kept in a secure manner and was not accessible to anyone other than myself and my research supervisors. Anonymity and confidentiality were also taken as important ethical principles in this study, especially with regard to protecting the participants from any negative consequences of their sexual preference, such as stigma, discrimination, criminalization and arrest. To this end, real names and addresses of participants were not recorded in any way throughout this study. Only nicknames and encrypted addresses were used to identify participants. Any identifiable information, such as the names of employers or relatives, birthdates, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and the like was not recorded. Information related to the above personal background and addresses were encrypted with codes and nick names.

Information obtained from participants was kept in a secure manner so as to avoid leaking of any information that could be linked to the participants of this study. All electronic data and

information pertaining to this study was stored in a separate data storage device that was kept in a safe and locked cabinet at times of non-use. All hard copy documents, including my diary and interview notes, were kept in a separate locked cabinet. Voice recording was not among the data collection methods and no audio files were obtained from participants or used as part of this study.

4 ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTED MEN IN ADDIS ABABA

This section of the thesis first explains how I came to the research field and then how contact was established with men who are attracted to men in Addis Ababa. Although I have lived in Addis Ababa for several years, I did not have any contacts with such men from earlier and it had previously been reported that establishing such contacts could be difficult (Tadele, 2010).

4.1 The search for same-sex attracted men

In December 2010, during the break between my first and second semesters, I went to Addis Ababa for two weeks, after making a plan for how I would attempt to make contacts with same-sex attracted men for the would be study. I had read, in the September and October editions of Rose Magazine (2009), rumours about some places in the city that were frequently visited by such men.

I had listed some characteristics that I believed could help me identify men who have sex with men, such as the way that they dress, walk and talk and the manner in which they apply cosmetics. I used my own ideas and some of what I had read to make the list of these characteristics. Among the characteristics that I thought could help me identify homosexual men in Addis were:

- wearing pink or red coloured clothes⁶ (at least the t-shirts or neck-ties),
- using nail polish⁶ and
- having a long hair style⁶,

I found additional information in an article published by Ethiopian researchers regarding types of places where homosexual men often meet in Addis Ababa (hotels, bars, restaurants, cafeterias and baths), signs that they use to identify one another (applying lipstick, rubbing the forearm⁷ and having characteristic stares) and their feminine ways of walking and talking (S.H. Gebreyesus & Mariam, 2009).

6 A male person in Ethiopia acting like 'a female' may be referred to as *setaset*, meaning feminine. Among the typical features of 'a female' in Ethiopia may include bright colored clothing, nail polish and long hair styles. When a man is found with these characteristics, he might be categorized as a *setaset*.

7 Rubbing the forearm entails massaging one's naked arm to send a romantic message to the other same-sex attracted person so that they can identify each other as homosexual men and potential partners.

I had chosen two places in Addis where I would try to look for men with these characteristics. Both of the places were hotels, but one of them had separate bath services. I had been of the impression that most sexual counterparts of Ethiopian homosexual men would be foreigners and hence, the hotels that I chose were known to host many foreigners.

I first went to one of the hotels that I had chosen as a site for observational data collection, with the hope that I would manage to identify some same-sex attracted men based on their physical features. For three days, I spent much of my time in this hotel and looking for men with the characteristics mentioned above, such as men with lipstick, nail polish and tight clothing of pink or red colour. I was seriously observing everyone visiting the hotel on those three days, trying to identify characteristics of ‘a female’ (see footnote 6). However, I was not able to identify anyone meeting the criteria or who I thought might be a same-sex attracted man.

Since I was spending so much time at the hotel, many waitresses there became familiar with me as they served me about three times a day. I also started greeting some of them who became familiar to me.

One of the waitresses asked me whether I was staying in their hotel. I told her that I was not staying there, but that I was doing something around their hotel. When she asked me what I was doing in that particular area, I told her that I was conducting an HIV-related research project. I did not immediately say that it pertained to same-sex attracted men. Since I had not come across homosexuality being discussed in a straight forward manner in the Ethiopian society, I was afraid to tell her directly. I thought that many people would not like my research pursuit or intention of being among homosexual men and I did not have the courage to tell her the entire purpose of my study. She believed that I was researching female sex workers and she said,

The waitress: If you are looking for *setegna adariwoch* [females engaged in paid sex] for your research, there are no sex workers in our hotel; who do you plan to involve in your research?”

Mekonnen: [After beating around the bush a little⁸, mainly saying that I was focusing on groups who are vulnerable to HIV and mentioning the current efforts to curb the pandemic] I am doing an HIV-related study among *gibre sodomawian*⁹

⁸ I was the one taking a great deal of time before having the courage to tell her about my research among homosexual men.

⁹ *Gibre sodomawi* (plural: *gibre sodomawian*) is a person engaged in a homosexual practice

The waitress: [She was not scared as I had been expecting her to be. She rather asked me more explanations about it] Do you know their bar?

Mekonnen: Which bar?

The waitress: They have a bar around here where many of the guests are *gibre sodomawian* (footnote 9) themselves and you can find them there. The bar is a café on day time and you can only meet many of them at night when the café turns out to be a bar. [She told me the name of the café]

This was the first green light for me in the search for men who have sex with men in Addis Ababa. I knew the café from before, as I used to have coffee there when I was a student at Addis Ababa University, but I had no idea that gay men came to that place.

I went to the cafe during the daytime hours and met Abdurhaman – a man whom I knew from before. He owns a private business just next to the cafe and is a health professional who used to work in an international NGO as a community conversation trainer. He had now given up working in the non-profit sector and had started a private business with his family. As we knew each other so closely from before, we updated each other on our lives and work and I asked him if he knew how to get in touch with same-sex attracted men in Addis. Unlike the situation with the waitress, I did not hesitate to tell Abdurhaman that I was going to do research among men who have sex with men. The reason for this was that I assumed that he would understand the existence of men who have sex with men and the need for research among such men and better understanding of their life and health circumstances. He confirmed that such men could be found at the bar next to his shop. He said,

You can find many of them here in this bar tonight. I shut my shop at around 6 pm and the bar owners use my corridor to provide outdoor services to their guests. Most of the gays sit in my corridor. I heard this from waiters and waitresses. Of course I know that many people who are not homosexuals also know that *gibre sodomawian* (see footnote 9) come and relax in this bar. You can also talk to the waiters if you have a chance to get to know one of them (Abdurhaman, a health professional and a business man in his 30s.).

This was the second green light in my search for men who have sex with men in Addis Ababa.

4.1.1 The Orange house at night

The second place I chose to visit was the Orange house¹⁰, where men who have sex with men were said to be hotel and bath service customers. At night, I was thinking about how I could

¹⁰ Orange house is a pseudo name given to a hotel in Addis Ababa that was believed to be frequently visited, for its accommodation and, particularly, bath services, by men who have sex with men.

reframe my ideas since they had not helped me observe something relevant to my work in the first hotel I visited.

I arrived in the orange house around 9:30 in the morning and took bath like everyone else. The woman at the counter who was responsible for registering coupons and assigning turns for the customers seemed angry. I had no idea why she looked like that, but I later observed that people were not listening when she called their ticket numbers and that some people did not come out of their bath rooms within the allocated amount of time (which was 45 minutes). She was going to the rooms, knocking on the doors and calling upon people to come out. I said ‘good morning?’ to her and she simply replied “good morning,” even though I had expected her to interact more. (It is common in Ethiopia that, when a person says ‘good morning’, the other person says something more in return, for example ‘good morning; and how are you?’). While I stood next to her, only a few minutes after we had first greeted each other, two men, one seemingly in his early 20s and another that looked like he was in his 40s, entered the same room together even though she had told them to take different rooms. I saw these men chatting warmly with each other while they were waiting their turn, but I didn’t assume anything about their sexual attractions since I didn’t think that they had any of the typical characteristics. But, when they went into a single room together, I started to think they might perhaps be homosexual. I was starting to wait for them to come out, but they didn’t come out within the allocated time. The woman’s anger was ignited again. She went to the door of their room and knocked loudly on it. After a few minutes, the two men came. When they left the compound shortly thereafter, I decided to follow them, thinking that they might want to sit in the hotel’s cafeteria and that this might be a chance for me to talk to them.

However, with a fast walk, they left the compound and took a taxi heading towards the north of the city. I went back to the woman to ask her about what had made her angry and whether she knew there were men who had sex with men in her workplace. Even if she didn’t ask me why I didn’t leave the waiting room after I had gotten my bath service, she was constantly staring at me. I went to her table again and said *selam new?* (How are you doing?) This time, she responded better to my greeting and said “I am doing fine, how are you?” I was happy because she looked a bit eager to talk to me. I had the impression that she was also surprised that I was still around after taking a bath.

I started my conversation by expressing sympathy about her very busy work and how some people were not so cooperative about leaving their rooms within the required time. She said that there were some men who did not want to improve the situation even if she was telling them repeatedly. “They don’t really care to other people.” Then I continued asking her,

Mekonnen: Do you think these 45 minutes may also be a short time for some people?

The woman: Absolutely not! I was told that the time limit was decided as a result of a study on how much time is enough for taking a bath here. It is even too much for many people. But some people spend more time than the allocated time; I guess such people would not leave the room even in two hours if I didn’t knock and say come out. You know, some people don’t care about the next person and they don’t leave the rooms on time.

After talking with her for a while, I introduced myself and my research project. First I told her that the research was related to HIV and AIDS. I was somewhat afraid to tell her about the focus of my project and so I first talked about the sexual behaviours that expose people to HIV, including sex by *gibre sodomawian* (see footnote 9). I asked her if she had some experiences regarding *gibre sodomawian* practices and HIV. She said “There are some rude men who want to have sex at the ‘back’¹¹ [anal sex] even with their wives.” I took this as an entry point for talking about men who have sex with men. I told her that there are men who have sex with men and that my study would target such men. I also told her that my presence in the Orange house was to find out whether there are some men who have sex with men who are customers of their bath service. I then asked her to share me her experience regarding male-to-male sex in the orange house. She looked a bit taken aback by my question.

The woman: Ok, are you also like that? I mean, are you also one of them?

Mekonnen: I am not a *gibre sodomawi* (see footnote 9) but I want to do an HIV related study among *gibre sodomawian*. I study in Norway and I came back to Ethiopia to know some information about such men before I start the study.

The woman: [looking relaxed after I told her that I am not among men who practice male-to-male sex] we are always with them. Some of the people who come out late from the bath rooms are *gibre sodomawian*. You can see them when they go into single room in couples.

Mekonnen: Do you think those men who came out late a short while ago are homosexuals?

The woman: Yes, they are. By now, I have no problem with them; God can ask them for their deeds. But I am very angry by the Orange house administration for failing to have some regulation on how many people can use a bath room at a time. Now, the Orange house becomes

¹¹ Penile-anal intercourse is generally regarded as an act of sodomites, even with girlfriends and wives, in the religious teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church.

like a hotel with bed rooms. It is not my right to say you can't use the same room at the same time as long as the person has paid for the service.

Mekonnen: Do you think your relationship with them is not so friendly?

The woman: I think they might fear us exposing them to the police. I swear to God I don't tell people about them because I even feel shame to talk about their actions. There are also some people among them I always sympathise with. *Gelachewun legenzeb yemishetu nachew* [They are the ones selling their body for money]. I think they are doing it for survival. They come with different men three or four times a day. They are very humble people. I feel sorry for them. They always put their valuables with me when they go into the bath. Many of them are younger than their partners.

Mekonnen: How do you know that they have sex in the rooms?

The woman: [after an extended laugh] it is easy to know that they are having sex. If you ask me if I have seen the sex with my own eyes, I haven't seen anyone [laugh!]. But especially when I am in the night shift I can see them when they start it from the waiting room. They rub each other and kiss especially when they are drunk, they are not afraid to do a lot of *medarat*¹² [performing seductive and romantic acts]. We also get reports from our cleaners that they find condoms in some rooms after two men have used the room, and I myself have seen the condoms. Anyway, there are a lot of things that you can see if you come here, especially in weekdays and at night.

I asked the woman to introduce me to the cleaner so that I could ask her some questions. She called the cleaner over and we were introduced to each other. After telling her what we were discussing with the woman in the counter, I began to ask questions related to her experience with same-sex attracted men during her cleaning work. She told me that she used to be a peer educator for a local NGO working on HIV before she got the cleaning job. She was a young lady who had started to work in the orange house just a year earlier.

Mekonnen: The woman in the counter told me that you sometimes find condoms in the rooms you clean. Please explain about those condoms.

The cleaner: One day, I saw two men getting into this room [pointing to a nearby room] and after 45 minutes I came back to clean that room. I strongly pushed the room to open it thinking that nobody was inside. The door was opened since it was not properly locked. However, what I observed was something very amazing for me when the door was opened. *Wond lewond wosib seadergu agegnehuachew* [I found them having anal sex]. I was really scared. They left the room immediately and I found used condoms when I cleaned the room. I went home and told my father what I had seen and the condoms I had taken away. I also told to my father that I had decided to quit my job. My father convinced me to continue with my job but to use gloves when I clean. After that first encounter, I became very familiar with such men in the Orange house and I have gotten used to the condoms.

¹² This term denotes seductive and romantic acts which may include, but are not limited to, kissing, rubbing and hugging. In Ethiopia, performing seductive and romantic acts that lead to sexual arousal in public places are traditionally regarded as public indecency, even for heterosexual couples.

4.1.2 The bar in the evening

I went to the cafeteria before it turned out to be a bar at night. There were many guests in the cafeteria at the time of my arrival. At 6 pm the café stopped serving coffee, tea and similar drinks and started to sell beer and other alcoholic drinks. That is the time that they call it a bar. The number of people was increasing by around 7:00 pm and I estimated that the proportion of male to female guests were about 3:1. The majority of those who were present seemed to be between twenty and thirty years old. Most of the music playing in the bar was in English, but there were also some African beats. The bar manager was patrolling around and, from time to time, was also greeting some guests. While sitting alone, I also received his warm greetings and this led to a short conversation,

The manger: *Tena yistelegn* [hello] Welcome! Please enjoy yourself!

Mekonnen: [I stood up and shook his hand with due respect] Thank you! Your bar is nice. I liked it very much.

The manager: Thank you and please enjoy the most!

Mekonnen: Sir, if it is not difficult for you, please accept my invitation for one of these very nice beers you are serving.

The manager: Ok, thank you! God bless you! I will drink, but I cannot sit down here as I have to patrol all around. I will use the balcony inside. If you are not waiting for anyone, we can be there together.

I went inside and joined him, and we talked about the business. He was an employee and I learnt that his main role was coordinating the waiters and waitresses during the night shift. I introduced myself to him and told him that I was a student in Oslo, planning to write my master's thesis on HIV-related issues among men who have sex with men. Since I had been told by the waitress and Abdurhaman that same-sex attracted men are known to visit the bar, I did not worry about telling the manager this. My assumption was that he was aware of men who have sex with men. I told him that I had heard that men who have sex with men come to his bar as customers and asked him if he would be able to connect me with some of them.

Mekonnen: As I explained to you, I am planning to do a research among *gibre sodomawian* [homosexuals] in Addis Ababa. I came back from Norway this week to do a preliminary assessment of whether I can manage to meet such men. I heard that some of these men could be found here as guests and I think you could help connecting me with some of them. Would you please tell me what you think about this?

The manager: *gibre sodomawian* (see footnote 9) had a separate corner in this bar some time ago but now it is no more existing due to the violence that happened some time ago between gay men and some drunk other men. They themselves created such a separate corner. We don't want to have gays in this bar as it might also be dangerous for us from the side of the government but at the same time we don't want to prevent them from coming here as far as we are doing this business. They are very peaceful people, but others disturb them. That is what we fear. There was physical violence that time and some of gay men were hurt but did not report it to the police. After that day, the number of gay men coming to this bar has been decreasing and they abandoned having seats in a separate area. Some are coming to relax in this bar but they sit randomly with everyone else. Some exclusive acts during dancing are not happening like it did before.

Mekonnen: How do you identify a *gibre sodomawi* (see footnote 9) man in your bar?

The manager: There are a lot of things you can notice. For instance, they usually have rings in their ears, they wear tight trousers and you can see how they romantically hug each other around the closing time of the bar.

After sitting on the balcony with the manager for about two hours, I moved to somewhere in the middle of the bar and took a seat, sharing a table with three other young men. I stayed in the bar and observed the situation as per the manager's recommendation. At around 10pm, almost everyone started to dance. Later, my attention was fully taken to four young men dancing, sometimes as a group and sometimes in couples. They were dancing in a tightly closed way that I hadn't observed amongst men before, sometimes crossing legs¹³ and embracing each others' bodies. I was familiar with such manners of dancing as only occurring among heterosexual couples. They sat and danced and sat again. They had to pass my seat and gave me a humble excuse every time they did so. In the process of helping them pass by, we became familiar with each other and gesture greeting started.

The next evening, I went back to the bar to follow the whole situation and, particularly, those four young men. I found them in the bar and all of them were drinking the same brand of beer (Castle) as the previous day. I followed them for about four nights in the bar and when they went out of the bar. They were acting romantically and in a way that I had never seen enacted between two men before, including kissing the back of each other's neck while dancing and repeating it a few times, massaging from the shoulder down to the waist, making constant eye contact when face-to-face, holding each other's hands and rubbing on the naked forearm. Since it had been confirmed by the bar manager that there were same-sex attracted with these specific, identifiable features, all that I saw led me to believe that they were same-sex attracted men.

¹³ They were dancing while embracing each other around the waist and with intertwined legs. This dance is most common between a man and a woman.

This was another green light in my search for same-sex attracted men.

4.1.3 The man in the rest room

The fourth evening, I was in the bar doing my observation as I had been the previous days. As I was waiting my turn in front of the restroom, a man came and stood behind me. He looked like he was in hurry to get into the room. He asked me whether there was a male or a female inside the restroom. I told him that she was a female. When the lady got out, I offered that he could take my turn, thinking he was in hurry.

Mekonnen: You can get in first if you want to.

The man: It is ok, there are two toilets and both of us can get in.

I got in and he followed; it was true that there were two toilets – one was a sitting type and one was a standing toilet. When I finished and wanted to go out, he partially blocked my way with his back and made the passage between himself and the wall a bit narrow. It was possible to think that he did not intentionally block my way, but I felt that he intentionally blocked it. We waited that way for a moment. He was following the reactions in my face. My impression was that he had deliberately blocked my way and I was not much in doubt that he was a same-sex attracted man. I was trying to look normal (and was hiding a bit of disturbance inside of me due to his actions).

When he turned around to get out of my way, he a bit stretched his hand towards me and touched me. I felt that he was checking my ‘status’ – whether I was same-sex attracted or not. When I kept quiet, he just kept standing in front of me. Then, I asked him to sit down together with me if he had some time. He said “I am happy!” I chose a location to sit but he said that he preferred a different seat which was approximately 3 meters away from where I was sitting before. I ordered beer whereas he said that he had had enough and didn’t want to drink more. He said that he came to this bar not to drink but to see if someone was around who could enjoy the night with him.

I decided to take time in order to know what he wanted and to let him have a chance to confirm it himself. A nice conversation was soon started by him. The conversation started with us introducing each other and he then explained why he came there and what he wanted from me.

The man: I am happy that you do not look like a *zega*¹⁴. I don't want to look like some *zegoch*¹⁴ *above* who look just like ladies by applying too much perfume and other cosmetics. I don't want to dress like ladies. You are just like me. You look great.

Mekonnen: Where have you been today? Do you mostly come to this bar? I personally enjoy coming to this bar, but have never seen you.

The man: Yes, many *zegoch* come to this place but I don't like it much. You know many *zegoch* who come here dress in tight clothes and have a feminine nature. I don't want to be viewed as a *zega* because people could be aware with those clothes. That is why I want to enjoy in other bars where *zegoch* do wear normal like me. By the way, I am going to watch a football match - Arsenal against Chelsea. Do you enjoy watching football?

Mekonnen: I don't really enjoy football and you can go and watch your match, we may meet tomorrow.

The man: I am very happy that I met you and I will not be going to watch football today. I am going to watch another football that doesn't have a highlight tomorrow that is you.

Mekonnen: I am sitting with someone and I can't stay with you much longer, but we can meet another time.

The man: Are you with another *zega* (see footnote 14)?

Mekonnen: No, just a friend who is not a *zega*.

The man: Why did you bring him here if he is not a *zega*?

Mekonnen: I want him to see everything here and then he can choose whatsoever he wants.

The man: You should not bring him here – it is a bad place for him; you shouldn't encourage him to practice what we do. You should first try to get out of what you are in.

Mekonnen: I am joking and I do not force him to practice what I do.

The man: What does he say when you are away from him like this much?

Mekonnen: I sometimes disappear from him and he got used to my behaviour but I have to join him right now.

By this time, I felt that I had gone too far in giving him incorrect information about me and I decided to stop. As our conversation developed, a lot of details had been forthcoming and I now started to fear what was next. At the same time, I felt that I could not tell him the truth about how I was there in connection with my research for two reasons. The first reason was that I was not really sure that he had deliberately been blocking my way because of erotic interests and that created an interest in me to hear it from him – to tell me in his own words what he was intending with his actions. The second reason was that, if I told him the fact that I am not a same-sex

¹⁴ *Zega* (plural: *zegoch*) is an Amharic term that literally means 'citizen' and denotes a same-sex attracted man when it is used by same-sex attracted men themselves.

attracted person but am, instead, doing research, I was worried that he could turn against me to defend himself since there was no evidence that I was not going to hurt him based on his sexual attractions that he had now told me about. I wondered whether he could kick me and call the police to arrest me by reporting that he was being humiliated by a homosexual man. I thus preferred to simply depart from him and I repeatedly told him that I would meet him the day after if he wanted to.

The man: Are you *kela* or *keta*? I have to understand your preferred role.

Mekonnen: [I was confused by his question. I was taking care not to miss something while communicating.] Don't worry, I will be okay.

The man: I have to know what you prefer because it is meaningless if you ask me to be what I can't be. I don't want to be *keta* [the one to be anally penetrated], I don't force you but it is nice if you prefer to be *keta*. What I want most is hugging, kissing, and warming up. Do you agree if I don't want to be playing *keta*?"

Mekonnen: [this time, I understood everything about *kela*¹⁵ and *keta*¹⁶ from his expression] It is nice.

[He stretched his hand forward in order for me to confirm my agreement by shaking it. I did that.]

The man: I am 101 % happy with you, you are a smart guy. I love your personality because you do not dress like those of other *zegoch* (see footnote 14). I have a class tomorrow evening and let us meet after class. It means that same time tomorrow. [It was around 9:00 pm at that moment]

Mekonnen: No, it is late; let us meet a bit earlier.

The man: What time?

Mekonnen: 7:30 pm. And please give me your phone number?

The man: No need of phone number. It is okay, we will meet here at 7:30 tomorrow. I don't use my telephone for this purpose too much.

Mekonnen: Do you still fear me?

The man: No, I don't fear people but God. Of course, it is difficult to say I fear God while doing this. [He kept silent a little] Anyway, I don't fear people. I think I fear God but I sometimes think I am doing badly. . Please take a sleep tomorrow afternoon, not to get tired since we are going to relax the whole night.

Mekonnen: Ok! [I escorted him some distance when he left the bar.]

¹⁵ *Kela* (plural: *kelawoch*): men who have sex with men derived this word from another Amharic word "*kelay*" (which means above) and use it to refer to the sexual preferences of men who take a penetrating role during sexual intercourse.

¹⁶ *Keta* (plural: *ketawoch*) is also derived from *Ketach* (which means bottom) and refers to the ones taking the role of anal-penetration.

The man: [He headed to the darkest part of the building.]

Mekonnen: I have to go back and join my friend [I didn't want to go to the dark environment in fear he needed to try to kiss me or touch my body].

We departed with a normal hug. I never went to the bar the next day and I didn't know what he felt when he missed me at the appointment place. This was an interaction which I did not anticipate in anyway and it was also a difficult situation how to act in that particular moment to make a balance between the ethical principles and the possible reactions I was supposed to act. The better way I thought to make him feel safer and to protect myself as well as not to cross more ethical red lines, I decided to depart immediately and not to meet him again.

4.1.4 Meeting Ashagre and conclusion of the trip

I browsed some keywords like 'gays' and 'Ethiopia', 'MSM' and 'Ethiopia' and 'gay and HIV in Ethiopia' to find out if there was any up-to-date information on the internet about same-sex practicing men in Addis Ababa. On the first page of results, I found photos of some Ethiopian men along with their contact addresses. I picked two of the email addresses from Addis Ababa and sent a mail to each of them explaining that I was a student who was planning to do a study among same-sex practicing men. I wrote the following:

My name is Mekonnen. I am an Ethiopian and live in Norway. I am now in Addis for 10 days. I am doing a research on issues related to same sex attracted men in Ethiopia with the University of Oslo. I will be interested if we get to know each other. Our meeting will be strictly confidential and please let me know if you are in Ethiopia at the moment, Best, Mekonnen

Ashagre replied on 26/12/2010, four days after I sent him my first introductory e-mail. In his email, he pointed out that he didn't care about the country the researcher came from.

Hi, I am in Ethiopia if you want to meet me. I don't care the country you are from but if you want to meet me, you can call me on this number [gave me a mobile phone number] (Ashagre, 28, email on 26/12/10)

The next day, I called him and explained myself once again, referring to our email conversations. The first thing I told him was that "I am not a *zega* (*footnote 14*) but I am planning to do research among *zegoch*." Though he was silent for a couple minutes after he knew that I am not a *zega* myself, he immediately resumed talking to me, asking questions about my research and answering my questions regarding when and where to meet if he decided to meet me. He

decided to meet me without much thinking and worries. We agreed to meet the next day and he chose the location – a known restaurant in downtown Addis Ababa.

We met as agreed and greeted each other as if we knew each other from before. During our discussion, I asked him to be involved in the planning of my research and to take part as a participant when the study would commence. We had a nice conversation for more than an hour and discussed things like how to access more same-sex attracted men and how to plan the study. On the same day, Ashagre confirmed that he would be willing to take part in the study as well as to invite his friends to do the same. He said that he was impressed to meet a man who was not *zega* (see footnote 14) himself but nonetheless interested in doing a study among *zegoch* (see footnote 14) and said,

It is very surprising and impressive for me to meet a *ket*¹⁷ [straight] person from Ethiopia who is willing to do a study among us [*zegoch*]. I am more than happy to participate in your study as well as to invite my friends to be part of your study participants.

Ashagre acted according to his words. While we were sitting in the restaurant, he started to send text messages to some of his same-sex attracted friends asking them to contact me and explaining a bit about my research. From that point and until I returned to start the fieldwork, I was contacted by same-sex attracted men who had been referred by Ashagre to take part in the project.

The success of the trip was not only that I had encountered same-sex attracted men (and people who had shown me that same-sex attracted men could be contacted for research – the waitress, Abdurhaman, the manager, the woman in the counter and the cleaner), but also that same-sex attracted men, referred by Ashagre, started to contact me. I was not the only person out there trying to make contact; same-sex attracted men were also making efforts and demonstrating interest in reaching me, including the man in the rest room and those who wanted to take part in the study (for example, Bamlaku, Sewunet and others who contacted me after being referred by Ashagre). I stayed in touch with these persons through email and telephone correspondence until the official start of the fieldwork, at which point all became study participants. They also served as access facilitators through whom I could connect to other same-sex attracted men for the study.

¹⁷ *Ket* (plural: *ketoch*) is a direct translation of the English word ‘straight’ (heterosexual) into Amharic and men who have sex with men communicate with this word to refer to a man who is not a homosexual.

4.2 Discussions and lessons learned

Peirce notes that an individual cannot be conceived of without his ability to connect with other humans. For Peirce, the ability to connect with other fellow humans is the main characterization of human behaviour. In his view, it is wickedly barbaric to conceive of the self as existing in isolation from others (Colapietro, 1989).

Men who have sex with men had been hidden from me for my entire life until the moment that I decided to search for them. Since I had not met any such men in Addis Ababa before, I had accepted that such men were hidden from me. Even though I was thinking that they could exist, I did not really think of them as part of the community or that they would be present in situations and places that were part of my own everyday life. However, after committing myself to making contact, it took me less than one week to connect myself with same-sex attracted men and to find out that they were members of the same urban community that I belong to myself.

Men who have sex with men are sometimes referred to as an ‘underground population’. ‘Underground’ is a metaphor¹⁸ used to convey the idea that someone lives in concealment or secrecy. However, the expression carries with it the idea that this concealment exists because people are ‘somewhere else’, apparently in a dark and hidden, unreachable spot below the ground where it would seem almost impossible to enter into contact with them. There is, of course, no such ‘other place’ where people can reside. Rather, in Addis Ababa, men who are attracted to other men are out there and among the rest of us. They are in the streets, at work, in bath houses, in buses, in hotels, in churches and at all places where we all live our lives.

This does not mean that they are always directly observable. When I started the search for men who have sex with men in Addis Ababa, I had planned to identify such men visually. This plan did work out in a few cases (and as I will return to in chapter 5), as I gradually learnt more about ways in which I could recognize some of the ‘signs’ that men exchange between themselves.

However, it was not always possible to visually identify same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa. As mentioned above, I spent the first three days in a hotel, hoping to *see* same-sex attracted men with no success. Later, I was sitting in a bar, also looking for same-sex attracted men, but I did

¹⁸ Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.

not even suspect that the man I met when I went to the toilet was same-sex attracted until he showed his interest in me. I was perhaps not prepared to experience that attraction towards me could be a way of identifying same-sex attracted men and it made me a little worried at first.

In addition to establishing contacts through seeing and through e-mail communications, I also made contacts through talk with people, including a waitress (who was the person who first indicated to me where I could meet same-sex attracted men), and, later, Abdurhaman (a health professional and business man), a bar manager and two women in a bath house). All of them were connected to men who have sex with men in various ways.

I had been afraid to directly tell people like this about my research activities. When I started to share more with them about my research project, however, I learnt that they had connections with same-sex attracted men and were not as fearful to talk about such men as I was expecting.

I had also thought that conducting research among men who have sex with men would be viewed as unachievable, both because such men are believed not to exist and because they are considered to be difficult to find if they do exist. Furthermore, I was also thinking that people might consider me to be a same-sex attracted man if I told them that my study targeted such men. I was worried that I could be stigmatized or arrested as a result. I had also been a little worried about contacting homosexual men themselves, fearing that I could be harassed by them or coerced by such men for their own erotic interests. These were the main issues that had prevented me from connecting with men who have sex with men in the past. When I got to know them, however, I quickly learned that they were not 'hostile,' 'difficult' or 'hard to reach' at all. Rather they were happy to contact and to be contacted, hospitable and friendly.

Since I believed that same-sex attracted men were hidden populations, I was planning extensive efforts to find them, as if they were hidden somewhere and staying alone. However, like anybody else, they were a part of the public society in Addis Ababa.

Men who have sex with men have been minimally involved in public health research and interventions and, among the most prominent reasons for this is that such men have been regarded as hard-to-reach populations. However, such men in Addis Ababa were, on a daily basis, spending time with everyone else in hotels, restaurants, churches, mosques, cafeterias, cinemas, streets, sporting places and at home. When I decided to meet them, I could, and after a

few days of fieldwork, I realized that they were also interested in associating with me. In the duration of the main fieldwork, moreover, I made many contacts and friends among such men.

5 ZEGA LIFE IN ADDIS ABABA

This section of the thesis describes the different social and emotional contexts in which human interactions between *zega* (see footnote 14) men occur in Addis Ababa – the contexts and ways in which men seek emotional and corporeal connections with other men and the rest of the society.

5.1 Naming

Before I turn to a description of these issues, however, let me first present some of the key terms that are used to refer to same-sex attracted men and other community members in Addis Ababa.

5.1.1 Mainstream terms

Let me start with the names that are in common use in Addis Ababa among people who are not themselves same-sex attracted men. Some of the terms used about homosexuals and their activities are perceived as stigmatising and derogatory by same-sex attracted men themselves. While some same-sex attracted men said that they don't worry about the names that are used to refer to them, many said that names are sources of stigma.

5.1.1.1 Gibre sodom

*Gibre sodom*¹⁹ (the act of *sodomite*) is a term used in society to refer to homosexual practices (the term is used throughout media such as newspapers, television and radio). The term *gibre sodom* is a term in public discourses (in the federal penal code, for example). The term *gibre* literally means 'work/practice/act' in the ancient Ethiopian language Ge'ez (a language that is being used only in the liturgy of the present day Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church) and *sodom* is taken from the biblical scriptures about sodomites. The person who practices *gibre sodom* is referred to as *gibre sodomawi* (see footnote 9) (a man practicing sodomy; plural *gibre sodomawian*) and, sometimes, *gibre sodom* itself is also used to name a person engaging in homosexual practice.

¹⁹ *Gibre sodom* is a Ge'ez term which literally means the practice of sodomites. Sometimes it is also used to denote a person practicing same-sex. This is the Amharic term nearest to the English term 'homosexuality'.

Many of the participants in this study expressed the view that the term *gibre sodom* has a strong derogatory connotation – one that implies that they engage in shameful and sinful practices. Bamlaku said it in this way:

Gibre sodom or gibre sodomawi is a bad name and I think nobody wants to be called this name. It carries the symbol of sin. I am also a Christian and read the Bible. We are completely different from those people mentioned in the Bible. Men in Sodom and Gomorrah were engaged in making gang rapes of other men and that was what they were trying to do to the two angels who were disguised as men. I also don't think that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah only because they were homosexuals. We love each other, but I don't think men in Sodom and Gomorrah did so. We do not rape, but men in Sodom and Gomorrah did (Bamlaku, 38 years old).

5.1.1.2 Bushti

*Bushti*²⁰ is another term used to refer to same-sex practicing men. It is a term used to describe a man who engages in homosexual practice. *Bushti* is less formal than *gibre sodom* but carries a stronger insult to the person it is used about. If a man is suspected to be homosexual, this term may be applied to him, even face-to-face, in order to shame him.

However, the term has a meaning broader than simply defaming a person practicing anal sex. When *bushti* is used, it also indicates that the manliness of the person is below what a 'real man' is supposed to be. To make it clear, it is important to describe the concept of *bushti* as it relates to the male-female relationship. In a heterosexual relationship and with regard to the male-female sexual encounter, the role of the man is understood as distinctly different from the role of the woman. The man is the *awuche*²¹ (top/active in sexual role) and the woman is the *woche*²² (bottom/passive in sexual role). Among the *awuche* and *woche*, there is the notion that the *awuche* (the man) has a position superior to that of the woman (*woche*) in terms of pride and importance. He usually says *awotahuat*²³ ('I had her for sex') instead of saying 'we had sex'. This *awotahuat* gives a sense that the important person is the *awuche* who virtually assumes power over the sexual encounter. Regardless of whether the woman engaged in the sex as a result of being influenced and forced or with her full interest and consent, there is not much consideration of her will or role, and the *awuche*, or man, is always regarded as superior.

²⁰ *Bushti* (plural: *bushtiwoch*) is a person engaged in a homosexual practice. The term is similar to *gibre sodomawi* but its usage is more informal than *gibre sodomawi*. It is a bit more derogatory, according to participants.

²¹ *Awuche* (plural: *awuchewoch*) means the one playing a top/active/insertive sexual role

²² *Woche* (plural: *wochewoch*) means a person who takes the bottom or passive role during sexual intercourse

²³ It carries a meaning that the man was the one who decided to have sex and benefited from it, regardless of the woman's participation or interest.

Providing an example might contribute to depicting the dynamics between *awuche* and *woche*. For example, we can assume that a food is made of several ingredients. If that food lacks salt, the whole taste that the food was supposed to have might disappear. When a person invited to a dinner recognises the missing salt, he might ask the chef for salt. Then he will find the complete taste of the food after having added salt to it. The guest appreciates the salt more than anything else in the food and, sometimes, the credit given to the salt might suggest that the entire dish is made of salt. In this example, it is obvious that salt has been granted more value than it deserves, even to the extent that it takes all of the credit for the dish and leaves none to be attributed to the rest of the ingredients in the food. Though this might not be a perfect example of the dynamics between *awuche* (see footnote 21) and *woche* (see footnote 22) in a sexual act, in terms of pride and superiority, it can shed light on how the role of the woman is not considered, similar to the way that the rest of the food ingredients were overshadowed by the salt even though, in reality, all of them made a delicious meal together.

When the term *bushti* (see footnote 20) is applied to a person who is not being suspected of being or known to be a homosexual, it signifies that the man is regarded as *woche* – as an inferior man who does not have the qualities of a ‘real man’. An important quality of a ‘real man’, as signified by *awuche*, is to be fearless of war, wild animals, darkness and the like. A man who is called *bushti* is assumed to have lost the courage of a ‘real man’ – he no longer has the pride of being *awuche*. The term *bushti* is given to men for several reasons, including if the person has excessive fears of things (like war, darkness and wild animals) and when the person is said to be acting like a woman (e.g. being involved in too much gossiping).

Men who are attracted to men in Addis Ababa may experience being called *bushti* (see footnote 20) on the streets, in bars, in sporting venues and in market places if they are suspected of being or identified as *gibre sodomawian* (see footnote 9). Mohamed was among those who had experienced being called shameful names in the streets of Piasa – an area in the central part of Addis Ababa.

In the evening, especially after we get drunk, we usually relax and may sometimes kiss or hug while walking on the streets of Piasa or spending time in bars. These things also happen between a man and a woman. However, when some people see us doing such things, they loudly say “You, *bushtiwoch, gibre sodomawian*”, gesturing towards us. People who say these names would like to beat us. Sometimes, we run away from those places to escape the physical harm that

people could cause us. Many people hate to see *bushti* and *gibre sodomawi* and may harm one when they see him (Mohamed, 24 years old).

Sewunet was surprised by how people may momentarily rush to beat a *bushti* if they hear that he is suspected of being a *bushti*.

When people suspect that you are *bushti*, they immediately try to beat you. Sometimes people give you this name by looking at your dressing style and some romantic actions. Even a person who is not physically fit to fight against us tries to beat us if he has a suspicion that we are *bushtiwoch*. But unfortunately, we prefer to run instead of confronting in fear of other serious harms that the surrounding people may cause on us (Sewunet, 26 years old).

Consequently, the term *bushti* may bring emotional pain, physical pain and abuse to same-sex attracted men.

5.1.2 Zega

In this thesis, I often use the term *zega* (plural: *zegoch*) to refer to same-sex attracted men. This is because the term is in common use among such men themselves. *Zega* literally means ‘citizen’, but I had never heard it used about same-sex attracted men prior to the fieldwork and when I learnt that it is in extensive use among same-sex attracted men, I asked my participants to explain the history of the word and why it is being used so much.

The participants had different explanations about the term, its historical background and its use. Ashagre said the following about how the term was coined,

Of course, I don’t really know when the term *zega* began to be used. It was in use when I came here four years ago. I may not be able to explain this as well as the ones who were present when the term was originally decided to represent us. But I asked my friends and they told me three reasons and I think all of them are nice reasons to be called *zega*. The reasons they told me why they chose *zega* were first to have a code name among us that cannot be understood by those who are not *zegoch*, second they wanted to highlight that we are citizens of Ethiopia [*zega* means citizen] regardless of our sexual preference, and thirdly they wanted to show that there is brotherhood, love and support between *zegoch* in the same way as between the citizens of a country (Ashagre, 28 years old).

When I proceeded to ask the same question to the rest of my participants, with a few exceptions, most answered that *zega* is simply a code name. None of them were able to remember when and by whom it was coined.

Sewunet told me a different story about the historical reason that *zega* is used as a name for same-sex attracted persons in Addis.

As you know, many *zegoch* want to be called *anche* [female gender: you], and to use this *anche* in public with their real boy name, it is difficult. Therefore, *zega* was chosen to be used as a common name since *zega* is also used to denote both a male and female in a speech of civilised people in cities [*seltun yeketema lij anegager*]. The term *zega* is used to address a man as a woman when it is used with the prefix *anche* [female gender: you] and people could not suspect anything from us since everyone uses the term in the same way (Sewunet, 26 years old).

His answer was based on the fact that the term *zega* has also been, at times, used by young people to address each other in greetings or to begin a conversation. His answer also convinced me since I personally know that the term *zega* is sometimes used by youngsters in a different context. In this case the term *zega* is used with a certain prefix such as *anche* (*anche* represents a second-person singular ‘you’ for the feminine gender) and *wosagn* (important). It is a style of speech used by ‘modern’ youngsters; *anche zega* (it is like ‘gentleman’ but in a female gender) and *wosagn zega* (‘gentleman’). *Zega*, in this sense, does not really show citizenship. Participants also combine *zega* with the Amharic term *hiwot*, which means ‘life’, when they are referring to their everyday life as a *zega*. Some of them use ‘life’ with the term *zega* and without translating it to the Amharic word *hiwot*. Due to this reason, the phrase ‘*zega* life’ is used extensively in the thesis.

As mentioned just prior, the term *zega* has three important features. The first is that it does not carry shameful connotations, the second is that it gives security for same-sex attracted men who use it and the third is that the term has a particular meaning in the language.

5.1.3 *Kela* and *keta*: ‘types’

Kela (see footnote 16) and *keta* (see footnote 17) are short forms of the Amharic words *kelay* and *ketache*, respectively. *Kelay* literally means ‘top’ and *ketache* means ‘bottom’. The terms *kelay* and *ketach* are neutral terms; they don’t describe sex specifically. But, in the context of *zega*, both terms are used to indicate the sexual roles that a certain *zega* may take – top or bottom. If a *zega* takes a penetrating sexual role, he is referred to as *kela*, and if he takes the penetrated role, he is referred to as *keta*.

All the participants agreed that the reason that the terms *kelay* and *ketach* are shortened to *kela* and *keta* is to make them difficult to understand for people who are not themselves same-sex attracted.

To express their preferred role in sex, *zegoch* uniformly use the term ‘type’. ‘Type’ is an English word but it is used by *zegoch* without being translated. When a *zega* wants to find a partner for sex, he prefers the opposite ‘type’. The question: “what is your ‘type’?” is a common one when seeking a partner for sex. ‘Type’ is extensively being used by *zegoch* like that of someone using his single profession to get a job.

Generally, there are four ‘types’ among *zegoch* in Addis Ababa:

*Kela*²⁴ is the “type” who assumes the top (take the penetrating role), while *keta* is the type who prefers to assume the bottom. However, men who are called *keta* or *kela* may switch sexual roles when there is a need to do so. For example, if there is a need to perform as a bottom, a *kela* can decide to take the opposite *keta* role.

Men who *exclusively* assume the top position are referred to as *yekela kela*²⁵, while men who are exclusively anally penetrated are called *yeketa keta*²⁶.

Many *keta/yeketa keta* are feminine, have soft voices, dress in tight clothes, have slim bodies and use feminine cosmetics. Many *kela/yekela kela* are characterised as masculine and behave ‘manly’.

The creation of the above four terms has many advantages for men who have sex with men as they go about their day-to-day lives. These terms have created a sense of community among same-sex practicing men, giving them the freedom to communicate even in the presence of persons who are not themselves same-sex attracted since such persons don’t understand these new vocabularies and to describe the desires of men in the group in ways that are not derogatory for them.

²⁴ *Kela* is derived from the Amharic word *kelay*, meaning ‘from the top’. *Zegoch* have discarded the last letter from the word *kelay* and created *kela* to refer to the sexual preference or role of a *zega* to assume the top. People who are not members of the *zega* community do not have the chance to understand what sort of meaning is conveyed by the term *kela* since the word does not exist in the Amharic language. *Kela* may sometimes take a role of being penetrated in situations when there is a need to assume the bottom position.

²⁵ *Yekela kela* is a term created by *zegoch* to denote the sexual preference of a *zega* who exclusively takes a top position and the penetrative role.

²⁶ *Yeketa Keta* is also a term created and used by *zegoch* to denote the sexual preference of a *zega* to be exclusively at the bottom (being anally penetrated).

5.2 Social life

5.2.1 Social contexts that *zegoch* in Addis Ababa belong to and create

5.2.1.1 Social activities and connectedness

There are many activities and many places throughout which same-sex practicing men can be found. One of the interesting social features noticed during the fieldwork was that very many *zegoch* (see footnote 14) spend much time with their friends. Employed, unemployed, businessmen and those of different careers all gather together in the evenings, sometimes one-on-one and sometimes in small or large groups. They lead life together, drinking, talking, enjoying or having sexual affairs until the middle of the night, and sometimes throughout the whole night.

Many agreed that one of the things they love about being *zegoch* is the life they lead together. Some of them said that they escape from their parents at night to join their friends in bars and night clubs. Many friends spend time in bars, in *shisha* (see footnote 4) or *khat* (see footnote 5) houses and in some *zega* houses, where they experience the relative freedom to engage in social activities such as smoking *shisha* (see footnote 4) and chewing *khat* (see footnote 5).

There are also some hotels and bars that I visited during the fieldwork phase and that are owned by *zegoch*. Some of these hotels and bars are also staffed with waiters who are *zegoch* and, even though these hotels and bars are not serving only *zegoch*, *zegoch* have many privileges in such establishments. For example, when they want to have grand parties, such as birthday or farewell celebrations, such establishments provide services exclusively to *zegoch*.

Ashagre can stand as a good example of how important many *zegoch* feel the *zega* social life:

I have a plan to stop the *zega* life to start another life. I want to be married and have children and to forget the *zega* life. That is why I had a girlfriend [*ayne tila*]. But I have no idea how I can tolerate to live without my *zega* friends. They are the ones who understand me most and create fun in my life.

Some *zegoch* are more connected to each other than others, and a few live together. If one of them has a chance to acquire income, for example, from employment or a gift from a sex partner, the money is consumed together.

In the Ethiopian society, religious practices are very important. All of my participants said that they have a religion and participate in religious practices. The participants' religious

backgrounds and participatory activities ranged from those who took higher trainings in their respective religious teachings to those who did not have any further knowledge about their religion after they inherited it from their parents. Like any average Muslim and Christian, most were attending major religious celebrations and holidays.

5.2.1.2 Social activities through the week

During my fieldwork in Addis Ababa, I was able to observe that each day has a different social pattern for *zegoch* in terms of enjoying life, in general, and in terms of finding new partners, in particular.

Saturday was the day during which many *zegoch* were entertaining the most. Many go to clubs on Saturday night, after spending time in small groups earlier in the day. During the day, they meet in small groups of people who know each other and spend the day chewing *khat* (see footnote 5) and smoking *shisha* (see footnote 5). For *zegoch*, Saturday night, around 8 pm, is special. Many expect to meet a new partner and hence prepare to go out to clubs wearing their most fancy clothing and cosmetics. The night is dedicated to visiting clubs, visiting some known Saturday night *jerera*²⁷ places, drinking and dancing.

Many said that they are physically tired on Sundays and mostly spend the morning sleeping and the afternoon in small group parties. If new partners have met during Saturday night parties, they typically spend Sundays together.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are mostly calm days for *zegoch* in Addis Ababa. Except for some occasions of large parties, most men spend these days at their homes. These three days are known as the uneventful days of the week. I observed that the streets of Addis Ababa have a small number of people during these three nights and that the clubs do not have many customers. Going to *jerera* places and using other partner finding systems are the most common strategies for establishing contact with other *zegoch* during these days. If a same-sex attracted person does visit clubs during these days, he does not spend the whole night in the club since other people do not stay out late. One-on-one entertainment is common everywhere on these days and *khat* and *shisha* places are mostly visited during the day times.

²⁷ *Jerera* is a term used by same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa to describe the practice of presenting oneself when going to places where same-sex attracted men come to find sexual partners.

On Wednesdays, the number of people visiting the clubs increases by a moderate amount and same-sex attracted men's interest of enjoying themselves in groups and at clubs also regenerates. This interest gets stronger on Thursdays and almost everyone visits clubs on Friday. The main difference between Fridays and Saturdays is that people do not stay out all night long on Fridays, while they usually spend the entire night out on Saturdays. They also do not exert as much of an effort to dress well and wear cosmetics on Fridays. Information about what is planned for Saturday night is disseminated during Friday nights. In many respects, Fridays can be taken as preparation for Saturday nights.

5.2.1.3 Internet and social media in the life of *zegoch*

Internet and social media are powerful means of connecting *zegoch* and contribute to the creation of a *zega* subculture. There are many pro-gay websites that can be easily accessed in Ethiopia and on which it is possible to create one's profile online so that others interested in him can easily contact him after viewing his profile picture and personal details. I observed that those who are internet literate are dedicated to using internet and social media websites as a means of communicating and networking with their fellow *zegoch* in Addis and elsewhere in Ethiopia and the world. There are blogs, Yahoo groups and Facebook pages throughout which only LGBT²⁸ people are allowed to join. Admission to these pages is not possible for everyone, but needs referral from an existing member. I obtained access to the Yahoo-group 'ethiolgbt' and some Facebook networks through referrals from some of the study participants. The discussions on these blogs are diverse, covering issues related to the social, cultural and legal aspects of the lives of men who are attracted to other men. Partnership messages were also posted on their public pages. If someone is moving, say, from Addis Ababa to Gondar (about 700 km away), he puts messages on these public pages with his specific details so that others can easily meet him during his stay in Gondar.

Despite the slow internet connection in Ethiopia, *zegoch* use the internet as a means of finding partners and sustaining existing friendships through communication. Some *zegoch* have good and free internet access from the offices where they work and have better opportunities to visit many websites than those who use internet on a payment basis in internet cafes.

²⁸ LGBT- the term is used in English-speaking, Western cultures to collectively denote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and communities.

I usually use internet to find new partners and to communicate with partners I have already made contacts with. I have free internet access in my office and visit a number of blogs, websites and social media sites to find new partners and to sustain the existing ones. The social media pages, blogs and websites including Facebook and others are so helpful to get friends online. I also use personal connections to find partners. I believe that we are not the only ones in Ethiopia to find one another but all *zegoch* across the world. When foreign *zegoch* plan to visit Ethiopia, they use all the possible ways to meet us [*zegoch*] in Ethiopia, at times they even come in couples. They meet us; share their experiences with us, and we often have sexual relationships with foreigners who contact us through online search (Kaleb, 19 years old).

The Yahoo-group page states that it is for Ethiopian and Eritrean lesbians and gays and their friends. The site calls itself “We are family”. It announces that it is a platform for exchange of information and experiences, and it encourages members to post pictures and personal information. It claims not to be a dating site. The site does not take responsibility for any consequences that might result from people posting real names and other personally-identifiable information, and it advises its members to take care in their personal postings. I have not seen any real names or other personally-identifiable information about my study participants, such as telephone numbers, on the websites, blogs, Yahoo-groups, Facebook and other social media networks I was admitted to. If someone is interested in being contacted by someone else from the network, he requests in-boxed messages from the person who needs to contact him.

Below is what is posted on their yahoo-group front page:

Selam [hello] all Ethiopians, Eritreans and their friends, this is a site dedicated for gay and lesbian Ethiopians and their friends. We are hoping this site will allow many Ethiopians/Eritreans to express their experiences and learn from them. We encourage members to use the site as they wish by posting messages, pictures, and links of other sites which are informative and related to us. And please avoid posting materials of any kind. Note: Although we encourage members to post some basic personal information like age, location, etc., everyone should be responsible for what they put on the message boards. Please do not post real names, phone numbers, gay spots or hangouts in Addis or other parts of Ethiopia/Eritrea. This is not a dating site. By yahoo-groups standards, this is an adult site and age restricted. *Beterefe* [moreover], people, I hope you will enjoy our group.

The Facebook network created by same-sex attracted men has certain differences compared to the Yahoo-groups. While the Yahoo-groups have administrators, in the Facebook network, every individual is responsible for the new people he is adding to his network. Facebook seems to be a more powerful way of meeting partners, as it provides access to detailed information about the person as well as an online chat service. Bamlaku’s experience with Facebook has showed me the possibility of establishing an initial connection through Facebook that can then evolve

through more secure communication channels at a later stage. He shared his experience in the following way:

I use Facebook because it gives me more chance to express my feelings and interests through chats. If I come online, I meet an average of 10-15 *zegoch* at once and I chat with many of them simultaneously and share a lot of things within a short time. I can get more specific information about those who might have an interest in me for further friendship and relationships. A year ago, I had about 500 telephone numbers of *zegoch* which I obtained via those communication channels, most importantly from Facebook. I deleted all that one day last year when I became impatient of my unnecessarily extended connections. When I calmed down, I started to record phone numbers of *zega* friends again and I have now more than 400 telephone numbers. Of course, I don't regularly communicate with all of them, but I have access to choose with whom I want to talk [He showed me the numbers he saved with code numbers and names and even though I didn't count them, I felt that they matched the number he mentioned.]

5.2.2 *Qirb gwadegnet*: Close friendships

My friends are everything for me. A *zega* (see footnote 14) friend is so special for me; he is a friend just like any friend and he is also a friend to share all my secrets of being a *zega* which I never share with anyone in the family (Mohamed, 24 years old).

Although the keeping of secrets is normally expected in every friendship, a person may have a stricter responsibility to keep the secrets of his friends when the disclosure of those secrets could have serious consequences. Parents are not privileged to know about the sexual preference of their sons (nor are other family members), because same-sex attracted men fear to tell their families about their sexual preference. On the other hand, since this is so for almost every same-sex attracted man, hiding personal affairs from family members creates an opportunity for such men to establish and sustain close friendships among themselves.

I was amazed by the range of issues that I regard as secrets but that were discussed amongst these men. The bond between such men is indeed quite strong. Another matter that amazed me while I was in the field was their ability to make new friends. I have never before come across anyone similarly dedicated to making new friends, and many said that having made many friends is a powerful achievement in their lives. Making friends is an endeavour of every time and every place. The moment friends get to know each other, the same platform of sharing ideas and experiences starts.

Almost every day, a same-sex attracted man needs another same-sex attracted man, regardless of whether they have sex or not. The most important thing in the latter case is to be together and share ideas and thoughts.

For example, I ask a friend I know in Nazareth to recommend whom I should meet if I decide to spend the weekend in Nazareth. Then my friend gives me the telephone number or email address of the person and I communicate with him. This is another way to meet partners and good friends. Wherever we live in the country, we [*zegoch*] are so close in spirits and find each other. Whether I want to have sex with him or not, I always want to meet a new *zega* and want to spend time, share ideas and communicate with him. We are always exploring new people in the *zega* life and we eventually meet and share our life experiences besides having sex (Kaleb, 19 years old).

5.2.3 The social relations between *keta* and *kela*

I was able to observe a certain form of group-based stereotype among *zegoch* based on ‘type’. To this end, since *kela/yekela kela* are not so visible in social life, *keta/yeketa keta* sometimes claim that they are the ‘real’ *zegoch*. On the other hand, *kela/yekela kela* blame *keta/yeketa keta* for a lot of things. They describe the men in this group as being less motivated to work and learn, less trustworthy, promiscuous, economically poor and dependent on *kela/yekela kela*, addicted to substances like *shisha* (see footnote 4) and *khat* (footnote 5) and not very visionary about their future. They are also described as being in need of multiple sexual partners.

Ashagre, who says that he is *yekela kela* (see footnote 23), had the following to say about *keta/yeketa keta*:

Ashagre: In *keta* culture, especially among *yeketa keta*, many are not motivated to be independent in their economy and hence they are usually dependant on their sexual partner – a *kela* or *yekela kela*. This also leads them to frequently change their sexual partners in search of better economic conditions. Some of them also want to get some prestige by sleeping with prominent personalities in the *zega* life in Addis Ababa. I liked the relationship I had with my roommate in the camp because it was based on our mutual feelings. Though he was *keta*, he had never been expecting some benefit from me. I know many *keta/yeketa keta* who expect some benefit from their partners; even those having some income for survival do the same (Ashagre, 28 years old).

Mekonnen: Why do you think *keta/yeketa keta* are not motivated to be economically independent?

Ashagre: I do not know exactly. Many of them do not want a serious and regular job. Many of them do not have a job that earns them income and they want some benefits from their sexual partners such as opportunities to go to abroad and money for their day to day life. I also know some very rich *keta/yeketa keta* who are very hard workers and owning a lot of assets and have a stable life with one or limited number of partners. But most of the *keta/yeketa keta* are economically dependent and frequently changing their partners.

Many *zegoch* (see footnote 14) who claim they are *kela/yekela kela* have opinions resembling those of Ashagre’s.

Bamlaku who says he is a *kela*, but also confirms that he has taken the *keta* role many times and was of the view that many *zegoch* who say they are *kela/yekela kela* are not really *kela/yekela*

kela. Since *kela/yekela kela* is considered to be a superior social class among *zegoch*, many hide their *keta* preference in order to be seen as part of the superior category,

Being *keta* or *yeketa keta* is usually considered to be inferior in the *zega* community. And for this reason there are so many men who do not tell their sexual roles outright. Especially being *yeketa keta* is considered as inferior and as a person with some lacks. If they do not know from before, the first question being asked when *zegoch* meet on *jerera* is the other person's sexual role. Many *zegoch* prefer to say either *kela* or both *keta* and *kela*, and some may hide their preference. However, their real identity is revealed when they enter into sexual practice. I think this is inherited from the gender inequality between men and women in Ethiopia. A *keta* and particularly *yeketa keta* is considered a female and the social place he is given in the *zega* community is almost equivalent to the social class that a woman has in society. (Bamlaku)

The *kela* and *keta* distinction is not only related to the positions during the sexual act, but it also work as a 'typology' that stipulates social life.

5.3 Dating, sex, love and relationships

5.3.1 Jerera

Jerera is a term used by same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa to describe the practice of presenting oneself when going to places where same-sex attracted men come to find sexual partners. *Jerera* is an everyday and joyful event in the life of *zegoch*. While it is mostly practiced to find sexual partners, it is not limited to finding a person for sex; there are times a *zega* goes to *jerera* to meet another *zega* in order to talk, drink, share ideas and establish a new friendship. However, later on, this relationship might turn into a sexual relationship and it might also turn back to a friendship that does not involve a sexual relation.

The place to find a partner or a friend, the time of the week and the 'type' of a *zega* are the key aspects of importance when meeting a friend through *jerera*.

5.3.1.1 Places and signs of *jerera*

There are some known places where *zegoch* can go to find partners (or present themselves to be met by others), both for friendship and for sex. When someone wants to find a partner, he goes to one of these places, engages in *jerera* and presents himself to the other men who are on *jerera* at the same time.

Jerera (see footnote 27) has a lot of unique features that could easily be understood by a *zega* who is at the same place, for the same purpose. It includes the way that the man is dressed,

certain gestures, including looking into the eyes, speedy hand movements, walking styles (like catwalk) and staring at the *muka*²⁹ and groin area.

The known places of *jerera* include bars and cafeterias, party houses, internet cafes, cinema houses, steam bath and sauna centres, *shisha* and *khat* houses, sporting fields, swimming pools and in-door game centres.

One day, Bamlaku agreed to take me to a sauna bath to show me how *zegoch* meet new partners during the sauna service. We arrived at the sauna bathhouse at 6 pm and about 30 people were waiting their turn in the waiting room. A lot of them were rushing to take the first round, to which we were also admitted. I could observe nothing special in that particular moment and I asked Bamlaku if there were same-sex attracted men around us.

Bamlaku: There are only three *zegoch* in this sauna bath; one is the man I greeted when we entered. He asked me to stay with him after the bath and to be with him tonight. If I want to date someone whom I don't know before, I come and sit in the waiting room or hang around looking for a *zega*. I can understand the person's desires from the way he sees me. But some *zegoch* make mistakes when they try to date someone whom they don't know. One of our friends was kicked by a group of straight boys because he touched someone's dick assuming that he was a *zega*. But there are some characteristics we use to identify each other and I can easily understand by looking for those things. Such characteristics are common for *keta* or *yeketa keta*. The usual features are nail paintings, ear rings, tight clothing, a particular way of moving eyes and hands, the hairstyle, wearing cosmetics and so on. Quick and stylish movement of hands while talking, and movements of eyes, are the typical features to identify a *zega* (Bamlaku, 38 years of age).

I was not able to observe these features when I was in Addis for the preliminary study. But, on that day that I accompanied Bamlaku, I saw that there was a very tiny drop of nail polish on the tip of the nail of one of the men Bamlaku showed me.

I then asked Bamlaku what special things could be observed in cinemas and gymnasiums. He replied,

If a *zega* is in the room, follow the movement of his eyes and you would see him staring at the *muka* of other men. There are people who date each other even in the waiting room based on the signs I mentioned and the most important communication for *zegoch* is eye movements. In cinema halls and gymnasiums, if a *zega* looks at a person having some common characteristics such as eye contact, he gives signs with his eyes and smiles. The other person mostly responds if he is a *zega*.

²⁹ *Muka* is a term used by same-sex attracted men to denote the buttock.

After we left the sauna, Bamlaku took me to a cinema hall. When we arrived there, he showed me two men standing far apart, one continuously staring at the other. Bamlaku told me about how they could understand each other by signs, and when we got closer to them it turned out that one of them was Bamlaku's friend. When we moved to the other corner, Bamlaku said:

Look, this man, he is on *jerera*; notice the way he looks towards me. I think he identified me. I have never seen him before, but I can understand that he is a *zega*.

Bamlaku approached the man, stood there for some time and started staring towards him with a smile. The other person responded the same way and they then greeted each other and got to know each other. Later Bamlaku told me that the guy was looking for a *keta* and that he wished him good luck and told him that he was also looking for the same 'type'.

When we were leaving the cinema area, another person was passing by and Bamlaku told me the following about that person, whom he knew from another cinema centre:

I went to the cinema to find a partner. I met this man inside the building before the show started. We understood each other's signs and we sat down together. When the lights went off, he started sucking my dick. I asked him to stop and wait until we got out as I was not feeling ok doing that in the cinema. Then he said, "My brother, I have an advice to you: Jesus Christ doesn't like this thing and you need to stop doing such homosexual acts." He said so after he got satisfied. We then had a fight about his words. I am not sure whether he still recognises me.

Bamlaku also told me that there were some married men who have children who come to date a *zega* in *jerera* places,

I knew a man whose wife gave birth and stayed with her mum for three months. He was taking different men to his house and was sleeping with them as a *keta*. I refused a sex offer from him when we met at a *jerera*. I openly told him that I am not going to have sex with you; you have to be faithful to your wife.

5.3.2 *Fikir*: Being in love

Fikir was a major topic that men who have sex with men mentioned when sharing their life circumstances in same-sex relations. This made me interested in exploring how people experience falling in love. A previous study by Gebreyesus and Mariam (2009, p. 273) reported that sexual relations between men in Addis Ababa are "devoid of love" and this had made me curious about the topic. Although it might not be the case for all same-sex attracted men in the city, many of those who participated in this study had one or more love stories to share with me and they believed that love is the bond that mostly connects men in same-sex relationships.

Among many love stories shared during interviews, one was expressed in the following manner:

I had a lover and we stayed together for two wonderful months. We were both in love. But he suddenly stopped seeing me without explaining his reasons. I didn't want to lose him because I was in love. I tried to find out what happened to him from our common friends and they told me that somebody told him that I was dating other *zegoch* and that he got so upset because he believed I was untrustworthy. It wasn't actually true; I never cheated on him. In fact I was in love and sacrificing a lot of things because of that. I had had a very bad habit of having sex with many *zegoch*. It was almost an addiction for me. But I never, as much as looked in the direction of another man after I met my lover. I was able to manage to limit myself into a single lover for two solid months. This happened last year and I used to cry inside my house every night for a couple of months thinking about him. It was so hard for me to date another man again. I had a feeling that he also loved me and of course I still believe that. His rejection without even trying to find out the truth was so hurting. However, I still love him so much and I would be so happy if he changes his mind and agrees to renew our relationship (Bamlaku, 38 years old).

My fieldwork suggests that one should not make general statements like the one above. To pose such a general statement may not only be mistaken, but it may also have the potential to contribute to the already existing stigma and discrimination experienced by same-sex attracted men.

5.3.3 Long-term relationship and marriage

Social and cultural values and norms, as well as religious and spiritual views, are perceived by many as obstacles that prevent or make it difficult for same-sex attracted men to remain in long-term relationships and marriages. It is a common expectation in Ethiopia, both in the social and legal framework of the country, that a man should marry a woman and have children. To contravene this expectation, and to be identified as a partner in a same-sex relationship or marriage, is conceived of by men who are attracted to men as something that may be associated with serious consequences in terms of stigma and discrimination. In fear of being identified as a same-sex attracted man, many prefer to not to engage in long-term relationships.

However, there were participants who told me that there are a few marriages taking place in the city. In the following, I will describe the wedding experience of one of the study participants. Before I do so, let me briefly make some comments about the gendered way in which same-sex relationships in Addis Ababa are most often structured.

Same-sex relationships in Addis Ababa tend to be gender-structured; in every relationship there is a male and female gender role that must be enacted by one of the partners. The one taking the *kela* role also enacts the male gender (he is a “he”) and the one taking the *keta* role also takes on

the female gender (being a “she”). The nicknames used among *zegoch* also reflect gender roles. Names like Elisabeth, Rosa, Almaz (a typical female name in Ethiopia), Hanna and the like are nicknames used for those taking a *keta* role, particularly among *yeketa keta*. Almost everyone has a nickname in the *zega* community and those with *kela* sexual roles have male nicknames that are related to something they are known for. For example, I remember some names such as ‘missile’ (he is a man believed to have a very big penis), Mohammad Ali (a man who is believed to be boxing while he is having sex) and *Jetu* (a man believed to ejaculate quickly; *jetu* means jet).

As will soon become evident, this gender structuring also applies to weddings; the *kela* partner is the husband or the groom and the *keta* partner is the wife or the bride.

Though I did not personally participate in the wedding, I will describe Hermione’s wedding at some length as it provides a glimpse of a part of the *zega* life that is rarely described.

5.3.3.1 Hermione’s wedding

The bride was a 24 year-old man at the time of marriage (and when the interviews for this study were carried out). In the first day of the interview, I told him that I had given him the pseudonym Mohamed for the purpose of this research. I chose the name since he is a Muslim. He agreed with the name but, at the same time, told me that he preferred a female name. “I like the name Hermione. As you know, I am known by a different female name among *zegoch* in Addis, but if I were the one to select my name, I would have chosen Hermione.”³⁰

Mohamed is *yeketa keta* (see footnote 24) and known as *anche* (she) in the *zega* community³¹. He started having sex at the age of 13, with an 18 year-old boy who was a relative who had been raised with him in their family. Mohamed gradually got used to the receptive sexual practice with this boy and they stayed together in the family for six years. Mohamed was considered a girlfriend while his partner was the boyfriend. He says that they were covertly living a love life together in a family in which they were considered brothers. After six years of sexual activity,

³⁰ Personal names that are used among *zegoch* are given by the group or by senior members of the *zegoch* group. A *zega* does not have the right to select a name on his own. Nicknames are not limited to sexual descriptors and, most of the time; nicknames are designed to match any of the person’s characteristics.

³¹ I am not sure whether it is correct to call the group of *zegoch* a community or not. They belong to social networks and have certainly established a kind of subculture. However, they don’t have a formally appointed community leader or some of the other entities common to other communities. Since they share common values and are socially cohesive, I regard them as a community.

they quarrelled and split up because the boyfriend refused to test for HIV even though he had admitted to having had a sexual relation with *ayne tila*³² (a female).

Mohamed and his fiancé met for the first time at a wedding ceremony in which Mohamed was acting like a ‘mother’³³ for the bride and his fiancé was a guest.

I was a mother for a *zega* who later became my bridesmaid and he was a guest to her³⁴ ceremony. He was interested in me and took my telephone number. I did not imagine that he could call me in that short time, but the next day he called and asked me to meet. I liked his *wondawond* [manly] features and I was happy when he gave me a call. We met for lunch privately for the first time and made an introduction of our sexual preference. He was *yeketa kela* and he was happy when I told him that I am *yeketa keta*. The following day we met and had sex. We continued meeting in that way and had sex for about a month. Then he proposed for marriage. I told him to give me time to think about it and he agreed. When I told it to my friends, none of them were happy about the proposal; they advised me not to marry him because they regard him as an aggressive person. But finally I was induced by his proposal and decided to marry him.

Arranging the wedding venue so as to ensure that the wedding took place in a secure location was the most important preparatory matter. To this end, the wedding was planned to take place in subverb town, a small town 20 km away from Addis Ababa.

This place was chosen since the owner of the hotel was a *zega* himself and knew how to make his hotel reserved for us without allowing anyone to come as customers other than our guests.

After deciding on the venue, the preparations included making wedding cards, selecting best men and bridesmaids, arranging bridal gowns and other bridal cloths, planning for food and drinks and finalising the lists of attendees.

Mohamed told me that selecting best men and bridesmaids took them a bit longer than anticipated, as they needed to include all of those persons best known by both the bride and the groom. I asked him to explain how the selection of bridesmaids took place. Below is a description of how they selected the bridesmaids for their wedding:

³² *Ayne tila* is a metaphor in Amharic language and denotes something that prohibits us from doing things of our choice. There is an evil spirit named as *ayne tila* that is believed to prohibit humans from exercising free choice, especially with regard to their sexual partner. Generally, women are referred as *ayne tila* by *zego*ch as a result of being regarded as competitors against *zego*ch in taking men for sexual relationships.

³³ During the engagement or wedding ceremony, the bride and the groom are supposed to have parents available to lead some cultural and ritual ceremonies. If they don't have their own parents, it is normal to assign other people to act as a father and a mother. During the ring or wedding ceremonies conducted among *zego*ch, parents are from *zego*ch themselves since the real parents are not invited to the wedding and do not even know about their sons' weddings.

³⁴ ‘Her’, in this case, is addressing the *zega* bride.

We were trying hard to select good people as best men and bridesmaids to make our wedding warmly celebrated. Selecting socially interactive best men and bridesmaids helps to have a good wedding ceremony. My chief bridesmaid was the one for whom I was a mother during her wedding ceremony. The second bridesmaid was a *zega* who has been serving as a mother for many *zegoch* during wedding and engagement ceremonies. She is famous and experienced in organising ceremonies. The third was an Ethiopian-Japanese *zega* who came for a visit a couple of months prior to the wedding and I included her into the bridesmaids list since she was eager to be my best maid. We were not really close friends but she wanted the experience and we were also convinced that it was nice to include someone from a foreign culture. The fourth one was an Eritrean *zega* living in Addis. She was a close friend of my fiancé and she wanted to be among my bridesmaids since she was more feminine and was not able to be a best man for him.

Mohamed told me that the wedding venue was not mentioned in the wedding card for security reasons and that the invitation cards were dispatched only three days before the day of the wedding to avoid the possible leaking of information about the wedding. The person who was dispatching the cards was verbally informing the invitees about the venue of the wedding.

A lot of care went into the selection of a wedding dress for Hermione and her bridesmaids.

One of the challenges we faced concerning wedding dresses was that it was difficult for me to check the size of my wedding gown in public. Finally, we were informed that a *zega* has his wedding gowns store in Arba Minch [500 km south of Addis Ababa] he rented us with a minimum size adjustment. My bridesmaids wore their similar colour miniskirts. We had a professional décor and hair dresser. I did all what I could to pretend as a girl and I was successful. I had breasts made from orange; my facial and leg hair was removed; I wore earrings, necklaces, bracelets and a wig; I applied lipstick and nail polish, and all the necessary things to a bride was done for me too. We served our guests with cocktail and different types of drink including *tej*³⁵.

At the time of interview for this study, about a month had passed since the breaking up between Mohamed and his husband due to a conflict between them (but there were also glimpses of agreement after a month-long period of dialogue and negotiations with their *zega* friends),

He broke his promises and this started just before our wedding day. We specified what he had to buy me for the wedding and he finally failed to buy me those things except very small things which are not important for me. He promised me to open a shop for me where I can work and engage myself. He didn't do that. The other thing that made us to depart was that he was extremely jealous when I was in contact with anyone including his friends. Immediately after our honeymoon, he instructed me to stay at home all the time. That was completely unacceptable for me. If he was to be with me, it was ok, but he was expecting me to be at home while he was at

³⁵ *Tej* is a local wine brewed from honey and *gesho* (*Rhamnus prinoides*) and consumed in Ethiopia. *Tej* is historically linked to a drink for the royal family and it is served during large feasts and holidays in present-day Ethiopia.

work. I never cheated on him, but he never trusted me. In the evening on the day we broke up, I was in a club with him and two of his friends, one of them was his best man and the other one a man I did not know. He was repeatedly saying: “congratulations, you have a beautiful wife!” I was able to observe that my husband was not happy by his friend’s comments. While my husband and the other friend were dancing, this guy was asking me about how is life after marriage. My husband came and hit me in the mouth saying: “what the hell are you talking about?” I was bleeding a lot and his friend, the one who was his best man, took me to his house. In the morning, I returned back home after about two months of married life. He then started sending a lot of negotiators, but I am not still convinced that he really regretted and is ready to improve his behaviour. I still love him, but I am not going to live with him if he does not improve his behaviour.

5.4 Families and friends

Although there were few participants in this study who were in long-term relationships or marriages, many of them did not desire such relationships due to fear of stigma from families and friends. Many of them were hoping to live in exile, where they could experience sexual freedom, marry the man they love and declare their sexual preference and marital status to their families and friends. Interviews and discussions with many study participants had in common the fear that they will be stigmatised by families and friends if they disclose their sexual preference and relationships. Many men who have sex with men also believe that they will bring shame to their families if they are found in a same-sex relationship.

Bamlaku has been same-sex practising for more than 23 years, but he said that he does not want to be married or in a long-term relationship due to family expectations.

I am the only son to my mother. She had to stay single after the death of my father to make sure that she properly raises me. She sacrificed a lot to raise me in a better life she wanted her son to be. She loves me so much. She has so much hope to see me a better person. For her, I am the most disciplined son ever in the village. She always pushes me to get married and have children. She says, “I do not need an additional year to my life after I see you married and have a kid.” How can I tell her that I am a *zega* with all these expectations she has from me? I will never ever tell her.

Ashagre experienced relatively better freedom in the camp.

The longest relationship I had was the one I built while I started my career in a construction company. We had freedom in the camp, but unfortunately we departed as he wanted to continue his studies abroad after we stayed together for more than a year. I can’t forget the time I had with him.

As Ashagre’s story shows, there are places, circumstances and situations in which *zegoch* experience greater space and freedom to practice their sexual life.

5.5 The law and the police

Although homosexual practices, including marriage between men, are illegal and punishable in Ethiopia, stigmatising views from the community, including from family members, friends and neighbours, are considered more serious than any legal difficulties. In a group discussion about cultural attitudes towards homosexual practices, the religious teachings about homosexuality and the law criminalising homosexual practices, all participants agreed that the law does not affect *zegoch* as much as the former two. Many said that the law is incapable of identifying homosexual couples unless they themselves declare their relationship, while stigma from the community can occur even if a relationship is only suspected. Also, some *zegoch* feel guilty since they believe that same-sex practices are prohibited in their religions.

In a conversation about this issue, Bamlaku shared with me his views on how the law is less important than the stigma from the community.

I do not fear the law; the police do not do anything serious to us even when they sometimes have evidence that we are *zegoch*. I have never heard of any *zega* in a permanent relationship or marriage being prosecuted or arrested in Ethiopia. I don't think that it is so because the police is incapable of identifying such cases. That is why I do not fear the laws too much. But if someone in your family, village or workplace finds out about your sexual orientation, you will be seriously stigmatised. The matter will soon be known to many people and you will be severely stigmatised. Being stigmatised by your family, friends, workmates or villagers is so painful. I sometimes become worried that my family members or friends may probably know about my *zega* life. I usually take due care not to be frequently seen with the same male person to avoid the possible suspicion. That is why I do not really want a longer sexual relationship with anyone.

Despite the presence of the criminalising law, men who have sex with men in Addis Ababa felt that it has never been a direct threat for them. None of the study participants had experienced prosecution or arrest, and they did not know of anyone else who had. However, all agreed that the existence of the law presents an indirect challenge to their daily lives because it creates a negative attitude about same-sex practicing men and promotes homophobia. Kaleb explained why he hates the presence of the law criminalising same-sex practices.

I have never been arrested or prosecuted myself and I didn't see anyone directly threatened by the police. But, the way the law portrays our sexual preference is indirectly causing us a lot of challenges. A *zega* might be found raping someone like any *ket* (see footnote 17). But some people who have a negative opinion about being a *zega* claim that male children in Ethiopia are being commonly raped by *zegoch*. We can't do anything to defend ourselves against these false charges as we are already termed as illegal by the law of the country. The law backs up those who have hatred due to religious and cultural sentiments against homosexual practices. I am sad for having such a law in my country.

5.6 *Meketeb*: joining the *zega* life

*Meketeb*³⁶ is a decision point for a man with a thus far undesignated sexual preference who meets another *zega* or *zegoch* and decides to join *zega* life. *Zega* life starts from *meketeb* (in other words means becoming a *zega*) and, having understood this, I was also interested in learning more about such men before the point of *meketeb*, including the circumstances that motivate them or bring them to the point of *meketeb* and how they start the *zega* life after *meketeb*.

As I proceeded with my research, and as some participants had described man-to-man sexual attraction before, my study participants were keen to share how they experienced their first sexual experiences. While some of them recognised their attraction towards other men prior to their first sexual encounter, others did not have specific feelings of attraction towards either females or males before they had experienced sex. Among the interview accounts with those who had identified their feelings of same-sex attraction before experiencing their first sexual encounter, Nahom shared his experience in the following manner:

During my childhood, I used to love to be with boys. When I was grade 9, I loved my brother but didn't tell him. It was a strong love. I usually wanted to be with him and my sisters were jealous about our companion. I had always been associating with boys in school and I was worried about my feelings. I never told anyone about it. Sometimes, I used to be in a bad mood, didn't talk to my family and didn't study my lessons. During those times, my sisters used to advise me to go to church though they had no idea what happened to me. Walking and going to church used to help me to get out of my stressful feelings. One day, when I was in grade 11, I was passing near a hotel's outdoor beer selling veranda while walking back from church. Someone who was drinking beer inside his car said "hey, please come to me!" I thought he was calling to the person who was selling peanuts around. But the person in the car again said, "No, I am calling you." I then went to him; he shook my hand and asked me how he could get to the main road and I told him how he could join the main road. He asked me if I can get into his car and lead him the way. I agreed; I was happy getting a ride along to my village. He didn't finish his beer. He invited me to drink with him. But I had to decline as I never had tested beer before. He insisted that I should at least take one. He then drove to a dark area and started touching my hands and neck while driving very slowly. I didn't react. He told me that I am handsome. He then parked in a dark area and immediately kissed my lips. I was scared but didn't react. He holed and pulled me to his chest. At this point, I had an erection and felt so hot. He sent his hand and checked my dick. He then stretched the car seat back and turned his back to me. He shouted, "Do it! Do it now!" He put some lubricant and it was not difficult for me to do it. I felt extra ordinary happiness which I had never felt again in my life after that moment. He was calling me almost every other day and I was having a nice time with him for about three months (Nahom, 31 years old).

³⁶ *Meketeb* is an Amharic word meaning 'vaccinated'. When used by same-sex attracted men, the term refers to a man's decision to identify himself as a *zega* or join the *zega* community.

Whereas Bamlaku asserted that he did not have a clear understanding of whether he was attracted to men or women before having his first sexual encounter, after his first sexual experience, he believed that he became highly attracted to men.

When I was in grade 9 [I was about 15 years old], my father sent me to buy him khat [stimulant leaf commonly chewed in Ethiopia] and I met a young Somali guy on my way to the shop. He greeted me in English and I was happy to interact with him as he was speaking to me in English which was one of my school subjects. I was overjoyed that I got the chance to try my English. He walked with me towards the shop and when we arrived at the dark side of the road, he held my hand and rubbed it. He expressed his appreciation of my physique and I was happy to hear that. He suggested to show me his house so that I could visit him another day. I saw his house that day and went back again on the third day as per our appointment. He was touching different parts of my body and finally he pulled me back and started anal penetration. I still didn't know why I kept quiet while he did all that. I felt so much pain and didn't go to school for some days. Nobody knew what happened to me and I was not taken to the hospital. Then, after a week, I started thinking about meeting this man again and I did. I didn't allow him to penetrate me again but he did a brush sex and we were happy on that too. Gradually, I started to love him; I had to see him at least once in a week. I felt so happy being with him although I had the traumatic experience of the first sex which he aggressively did unto me. After sometime, the guy left the city without informing me and I was terribly sad about the situation. Though I didn't have a clear understanding of my sexual feelings before the incidence with the Somali guy, I was completely attracted to men afterwards. I used to appreciate in words when I saw guys with nice physique and big penis even before this incidence. After my departure from the Somali guy, I started sexual relationship with a waiter who had been working in our hotel. That was how I started a *zega* life (Bamlaku, 38 years old).

Some men who have sex with men remember their childhood experience of having sex with same-sex age mates, establishing themselves as sexual couples during their childhood and continuing from there.

I had to grow up in different towns as my family had to travel around because of the character of their work. I used to make friends in those places and acquire various experiences. In Shashemene, a friend of mine and I, both of us boys, used to have sex, pretending to be married couples. This happened around the age of 7. So, when a boy who was a bit older than me started to touch my private parts and showed erotic interest in later years, it was not a totally new experience for me. I was trying to convince myself that we were pretending as we used to do in our childhood. However, though it was not completely new to me to have same-sex sexual practice, I refused to do it when I was offered to have sex for the first time. But after sometime, his attempts started to flash back in my mind and I started wondering how it felt like having sex with another man. I started browsing online sources and came to understand that sex between two men is a common practice. But later, I loved the practice. I think my childhood experience had contributed for my becoming gay later in my adolescence (Liku, 19 years old).

I have included these accounts as knowledge on this topic is scarce, and also because they show how varied and diverse such men's experiences may be.

6 UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF ISSUES RELATED TO HEALTH AND HIV

This chapter focuses on the ways in which same-sex attracted men understand and experience issues related to health and HIV.

6.1 Perception about health

When I brought up the issue of health with study participants, many thought that I meant HIV/AIDS. Unless I specified that I was interested in other health-related issues as well, almost everyone responded to questions about health with answers that pertained to HIV/AIDS. They seemed to be of the impression that researchers are interested in *zegoch* mostly in connection with HIV and that my research was likely to focus exclusively on HIV/AIDS.

However, I proceeded by asking questions about how these men understand health and what they took a healthy life to mean. In addition to physical wellness, many made reference to the social environment in which they live. They defined health as being free from diseases and stress, including freedom from the idea that they may create stress for their families.

For me health is many things but most importantly it means being free from disease and free from fear. A healthy person does not have a disease and his mind is free from fear of anything. Living in harmony with your family friends and the community, that is what I call healthy (Ahmed, 24 years old).

Health is living a life free of diseases and mental stress. To be accepted in the family and in the community is an indicator of a healthy life for me. As I told you, my family members do not know that I am a *zega* and I am always feeling so scared when I think what will happen if they suddenly find out about my homosexual life. This always disturbs my mind a lot. So for me, health means being free of disease and of stress. You are leading a healthy life if you are free from disease and mental stress (Bamlaku, 38 years old).

6.2 Health challenges

6.2.1 Worries and stress

For some *zegoch* (see footnote 14), being with other *zegoch* and being with their families were quite different experiences. They might feel happy in the former situation but less so in the latter since their sexual life is not shared with their family members.

I am extremely happy when I am with my *zega* friends and much of my time is spent with them. But when I come home, I consider myself as I am alone while I am with my beloved family. I

love my mother and she cares much about me, but everything messes up when I am at home. When you are a *zega*, you have a lot to talk about; but how can I talk about those things with my family? (Liku, 19 years old)

Thinking about the future also brings worries to many of the participants. This worry relates to their families' expectations. Families expect their sons to get married and have kids, and when *zegoch* think that they will not have such a life, it brings worries to them. Mohamed explained how he gets stressed when he thinks about his future.

I don't think that we are living a healthy life. Yes, we are enjoying every single day with our friends, but when you are alone you think about your future. You want your family to take part in your life, but you are not sure how long you will go together with them if they once understand your sexual behaviour. I sometimes think about quitting homosexual life, but I immediately realize that that is my whole life. I don't know what to do. I am not even fit to establish a heterosexual life. I cannot consider myself a man. So if I decide to be heterosexual, am I going to marry a wife or a husband? How are we going to live two wives together? This is stressing for me. I fear this may cause me a mental health problem in the future. Either this should be accepted by the society or something should detach me from this life (Mohamed, 24 years old).

Some men said that *zega* life involves a great deal of social interaction and that attempting to handle social expectations might also create stress.

Sometimes there is a conflict between fitting into social interactions with *zegoch* and leading a successful personal life [such as actively attending school or having a certain job to earn income] and this creates stress in me (Ashagre, 31 years old).

Age is also an issue that introduces worry in life of some men. When a *zega* gets older, such men think that people may not be attracted to him due to his age. Husen's experience can attest to such beliefs among the participants.

When I was a young man everyone was interested in me to have relationships. But when I am getting older, people are not attracted to me. When you are a *keta* (see footnote 16), it is like being a woman in Ethiopia. If the *kela* (see footnote 15) doesn't show any interest, you cannot do anything. That is sad and it worries me too much. *Kelawoch* usually need younger men than themselves. I am among the oldest *zegoch* in Addis. Some *zegoch* call me a mother of *zegoch* (Husen, 40 years old).

6.2.2 Sexual health problems

Many same-sex attracted men expressed the view that sexual health problems are different for *ketawoch* and *kelawoch*. *Kelawoch* are generally considered less at risk of experiencing health problems whereas *ketawoch* may experience health problems due to their sexual role.

Kelawoch have lesser physical complications as compared to *ketawoch*. I don't have experience as a *keta* and I did not have any such problems. But my friends may face different health

problems such as anal cracks and infection around the anus. Their probability of getting HIV and STIs is also higher as compared to us [*kelawoch*] since they are receivers. If they don't have bleeding from their anus, I think we are safe with regard to STI and HIV. I am having sex without condom, but I don't have sex with anyone if there is any physical problem around the anus. If he is bleeding or have some wound around, I don't want to have sex with him (Ashagre, 28 years old).

While health problems among *zegoch* varied from person to person, the problems most commonly raised during discussions were related to sicknesses of the anal area.

Kelawoch may face itching, bleeding, cracks and discharge from the anus, and sexually transmitted infections. Bleeding sometimes happens if you scratch yourself because of a continuous itching in your anus. This itching is common to many of us and I don't know exactly what causes it, but some believe it happens if sperm is ejaculated inside the anus. I use condoms when having sex, but I have this itching for long time. It sometimes improves but comes again. Sometimes I also have stomach instability after sex. I feel to defecate but in reality that was not the case. I have many friends who are complaining about haemorrhoids. I think haemorrhoids are a problem that may affect every human being but I think it is more serious when it is with *zegoch* (Ahmed, 24 years old).

I sometimes have bleeding from the anus during sex. I see it after defecation. It also happens even at times when I do not have sex. It is normal for my partners if they see blood from my anus during sex. Some of them are unhappier when they find faeces than when they find blood (Mohamed, 24 years old).

Men who have sex with men believe that many of their health problems are related to intercourse. Many agree that a large penetrating penis and the absence of lubricant may cause anal bleeding and anal fissuring.

I have had infections around the anus many times. I don't know why such infections happen, but I have been bleeding from the anus at times and the infection might have happened as a result of that. The causes of such bleeding were when I had sex with someone with a big penis and when I did not use lubricant. So many times, I face a big penis and that hurts my anus. As *yeketa keta* (see footnote 24), this is one of the problems I face.

Liku pointed out that anal bleeding and anal fissures are not only caused by a large penis and the absence of lubricant, but might also occur when the size of the anal opening is small.

I think anal bleeding happens also when a *keta* has a narrow opening. I myself checked this out that people's anal opening are widely different and some have very narrow. The narrow ones may face bleeding and if the bleeding does not cure immediately, it may be dangerous. (Liku, 19 years old)

6.3 Care for health problems

6.3.1 Obstacles to the use of health services

Many same-sex attracted men do not go to a health facility to seek remedy for certain types of health problems, mainly because they fear discrimination from health care workers and the leaking of information about their sexual status.

They ask you a lot of questions about what happened to your anus. Of course they understand what happened on you even if you want to give a different reason. I went to a hospital only once when I had an anal infection. The doctor asked me a lot of questions about it. I completely denied when he asked me whether I had had anal intercourse. He started to mock me but he treated me. He asked me if I am abused by someone but I denied that. I told him that it happened to me while we were trying to have sex with my friend. I did that when he said that he will connect me with the police to find out who abused me since he was sure that I had anal sex. Then I told him that it was with my full consent and I will stop doing it. He started to tell me it is sinful and dangerous for my health. He told me not to visit him again if I do not stop having anal intercourse. After that I developed a mentality not to go to a health facility and I started advising my friends to act in the same way whenever we have problems of such kind (Mohamed, 24 years old).

Stories about bad experiences with physicians are circulating among *zegoch*.

I don't want to go to a health facility immediately if I have some health problem. I think the same is true for many of my *zega* friends. That is not because we don't know about the benefit of seeing health personnel when sick. My sisters go and see a doctor even when they have a minor headache or fever. But I think it is difficult to tell the doctor what happened to you if you have an anal problem. The doctor may say, I am not going to treat you, or he may shame you and may disclose your status. Many times we get frustrations from the health care providers since we don't think that they are friendly to give us health services. I have never sought any medical treatment related to problems in the anal area but my friends have had bad experiences from their doctors including being shamed and mocked (Sewunet, 26 years old).

The presence of some medical doctors who are themselves homosexuals is seen as an opportunity to solve this low level of health facility visits. However, these doctors may not feel totally free to provide treatment for their *zega* patients due to fear of disclosure of their own sexual preference. As a result, some do not want to offer *zegoch* treatment in government health facilities but rather do so in private clinics and in home settings.

There are few doctors who are homosexual themselves and they are taking the whole burden of treating us. Sometimes the treatment is carried out outside of the hospitals where they are working. Some of them have private clinics and it is no problem to go to them and get treatment. I have a sexual partner who is a doctor and he helps me in this regard. I also help some of my friends to go to the clinic where he works, but he sometimes tells me not to bring anyone to him since he fears that someone may disclose that he is a *zega* (Ahmed, 24 years old).

6.3.2 Treatment of peers

There are some *zegoch* who have developed some expertise to help each other with treating their sickness. One senior *zega* is known for providing such services.

My main problem is *yefenteta megelbet* (rectal prolapse). It is very painful and I have had it so many times. I used to go to a doctor in the beginning to fix it back. I told them that it happened due to pressure I exerted when I defecate. But one day, a doctor understood that it was caused by dry sex. He was angry with me and was unhappy to fix it back. Later he did it but it was painful. I felt that he deliberately made it painful for me. Then I stopped going to the hospital. We have a senior *zega* of my age and she fixes it for me. She uses butter as a lubricant to return it with smooth massage. She is known by many *zegoch* as a solution for such a problem after she became an expert on my anus (Husen, 40 years old).

Zegoch do not usually go to their doctors in fear of stigma. Some *zegoch* have been in the *zega* life for many years and they have gained a lot of experience regarding how to treat someone who gets sick. For instance, *ye fenteta megelbet* (rectal prolapse) is not usually treated by health personnel but rather by our friends. When you have some problem around the anal opening and go to a doctor, they ask you a lot of questions and do not want to treat you unless you tell them. They ask you, “are you raped?” etc (Sewunet, 26 years old).

6.4 Knowledge about HIV

Previous studies among men who have sex with men in Addis Ababa have reported that such men have misconceptions about HIV transmission and prevention. One study (S.H. Gebreyesus & Mariam, 2009, p. 275) reported that,

Almost all [MSM] have misconceptions, as they consider homosexual acts to be protective compared with heterosexual acts. MSM do not seem to use condoms, because they are thought to decrease sexual pleasure. Hence, unprotected anal intercourse is frequently practiced. Furthermore, among MSM, other high-risk sexual behaviours, such as multiple sexual contacts, are prevalent.

And, another study (Tadele, 2010, p. 275) published a year later found that,

The main problem with MSM in Addis Ababa is not only the lack of translation of knowledge into changes in behaviour but also confusion and misperceptions about how HIV can be transmitted and prevented. Thus, MSM in Addis Ababa often do not view sex with other men as risky and they often go to creative lengths to demonstrate that they are not at risk.

Many of the participants in this study were aware of the just-mentioned studies and these depictions, and many expressed unhappiness about them. They felt they were being portrayed as a group of men that are all alike, but pointed out that *zegoch* are highly diverse with regard to HIV knowledge.

Mekonnen: Do you know how HIV is transmitted and prevented?

Liku: I think I know about HIV/AIDS. It transmits through sex with a person who has HIV. I use condom every time I have sex to protect myself.

Mekonnen: Some people say men who have sex with men have a low level of awareness and knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention. How do you see this claim given your experience with yourself and your friends?

Liku: I am always offended to hear that *zecho* have low awareness about HIV and I wonder how people come to this conclusion. The fact is that a *zega* may be a physician, a *zega* may be a nurse, a *zega* may be an engineer, a *zega* may be a sociologist; the *zega* community is comprised of people with different professions including those without formal education, just like any community. Therefore, there is no way that *zecho* could have lower awareness about HIV than *ketoch* [heterosexuals]. However, I agree that to practice what they know may be a challenge among *zecho*. They know condoms prevent HIV, but many do not use condoms. But this is I think related to behaviour, not knowledge or information (Liku, 19 years old).

And, Azene answered the question in the following way:

I knew about HIV and I knew condom prevents HIV, but I never used condoms, not even a single day, before I got tested for HIV. Condoms were not an issue for us for many years. We were concentrating on making love; the nights were dedicated for lovemaking, not for thinking about condoms. None of the men whom I had sex with asked me about using condoms (Azene, 40 years old and HIV positive).

All of the participants in this study knew that HIV is sexually transmitted and that it can be prevented with condoms.

6.5 HIV testing

Recently, Ethiopia introduced a millennium HIV testing campaign through which different groups are encouraged to get HIV counselling and testing. Among the specified aims of the campaign are couples testing, testing among political leaders and testing for university students. The campaign has brought an unexpected high number of Ethiopians to test for HIV and, particularly, people in the cities took part in the campaign. In only one year (2009), 5.8 million Ethiopians got tested for HIV (HAPCO, 2010). However, this national campaign was not mentioned by any of the participants in this study when they shared their experiences regarding HIV testing. In fact, only a few of the participants had ever tested for HIV.

Among the few who had, the motivation for testing was sometimes initiated by the death of a *zega* friend who was suspected to be HIV positive.

Kaleb: I have tested for HIV twice in my life, one for myself and the other one is for the current research [during the fieldwork for this study, there was also another study going on in Addis].

Mekonnen: In your first HIV test, how did you get motivated to have a blood test for HIV?

Kaleb: One day, we discussed about our two friends who died after being seriously sick. None of us knew about the cause of their sickness except speculations. We were gossiping that the cause of their sickness was HIV but we had nothing to prove it. On the same day, we also discussed about testing for HIV and some of us decided to go to a VCT centre to get tested. I was negative and I was so relieved. When people stayed inside for a long time, I was thinking that they were told that they are positive but when they came out they were laughing and enjoying. The second test was made when I took part in a research project, and I got the result there also. I was still negative and I thank God for that. God has given me more time to learn and get closer to Him but I am not sure whether I will take a lesson and correct myself.

Though there were different reasons for why men did not visit health facilities for HCT, fear of stigma and discrimination were prominent reasons pointed out by many participants.

Mekonnen: Why do you think many of you have not been tested for HIV?

Sewunet: One of the reasons is fear of being positive. If you are positive you will have a dark hope.

Mekonnen: Does it mean *zegoch* don't fear HIV?

Abera: Many *zegoch* do not test for HIV. But that does not mean they do not fear HIV. If there is a rumour, for example, about someone who is suspected to be living with HIV, then nobody wants to have sex with that person. Even his friends might also be stigmatized. You know we don't go to testing but we do not risk ourselves for HIV sleeping with an HIV suspect.

Despite their openness and ability to discuss their lives in an open manner, many *zegoch* said that they don't generally share information about their HIV status with other *zegoch*. They did not want to reveal their HIV status due to fear of stigma and discrimination and because they feared that they may become less attractive to sexual partners.

I know some friends who are on ART. They drink; they have sex, chew *khat*, smoke *shisha* and cigarette. I know such things will aggravate their disease but they do not stop those behaviours. Because if someone stops drinking and chewing *khat* then people may automatically say, he is HIV positive. As a result he will be stigmatized so that is why he has to drink. I would also drink if I was positive (Ahmed, 24 years old).

I have friends living with HIV but many times we don't know who is living with HIV and who is not. Unlike other things, when it comes to HIV, people do not talk about their secrets. But there are always a lot of rumours and you hear about people's HIV status although it is not likely to be proven information. There is also gossiping about people who are suspected to take HIV medicine, but we do not know for sure who are taking drugs (Liku, 19 years old)

Those who are HIV positive may pretend to be free of HIV in order to not be identified by their friends.

I am now taking antiretroviral therapy (ART). If you are on ART, your doctor tells you not to chew *khat*, smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol. He also tells you not to have sexual intercourse or to have it only a few times per month. However, I follow none of those instructions. Ok, let alone quitting sex which is the most important part of my life, but I cannot stop *khat*, cigarettes and *shisha* and alcohol. If I stop those things, my friends will all agree that I am HIV positive. That will be painful for me. Even now, there are some friends who ask me whether I am HIV positive since I was bedridden for some time and now have become fatter due to the ART drug. I think some of them have concluded already. But since I did not confirm or did not stop attending everything with them, nobody is sure that I am HIV positive (Husen, 40 years old and HIV positive).

During the fieldwork, an HIV seropositivity study had been conducted among men who have sex with men by CDC in Addis Ababa and many of the participants in this study consulted me about the research. We discussed about it and I told them, if they tested that it did not have any conflict with my study and many of them participated in that study. All of them said they received their results but nobody said he received a positive test result.

6.6 Condoms and lubricants

There are mixed views on condom use among *zegoch*. Some say that they use condoms every time that they have sex while others say that they don't use condoms when they have sex with their intimate friends. Intimate friends are close friends who have sexual relationships for longer periods of time and they are sometimes referred to as boyfriends³⁷. In the latter case, some feel that asking for condoms might create feelings of mistrust.

Bamlaku is among those who use condoms when having sex with men met on *jerera* but not with men who are intimate friends.

When I meet a person during *jerera* [hanging out to find partners] or the first time in a bar, there is no doubt I use condom because it is less likely for me to know about his sexual history. But I do not use condom with my intimate friends. Of course, when we become boy-friends, we talk about everything so openly and we also discuss about our sexual histories. In the course of time in love, we build trust towards one another. If I love my partner, I don't want to use condom. I trust if he tells me that he does not have HIV [...] (Bamlaku, 38 years old and 23 years since he started his first same-sex practice).

Condoms are frequently seen as an obstacle to satisfaction for both *kelawoch* (see footnote 15) and *ketawoch* (see footnote 16). Among *kelawoch*, condoms are said to cause erectile failure and

³⁷ For close friends who have sex each other for long periods of time, such friendship sometimes grows and these persons become 'boyfriends'. The English term 'boyfriend' is used without being translated.

premature ejaculation, whereas some *ketawoch* explain that they need sperm to be directly ejaculated into the anus for better satisfaction.

Using condom is not good for either *keta* or *kela*. *Kelawoch* say it kills erection, and it also reduces sexual pleasure for us [*ketawoch*]. I get more satisfaction when I feel the sperm directly (Sewunet, 26 years old).

Age may also play a role in shaping men's attitudes towards using condoms. Ahmed's experience suggests that older *zegoch* are more reluctant to use condoms and lubricant than younger ones.

In my experience, older *zegoch* do not want to use condom. They are not happy to use it. But I am not willing to have sex without condom. During such times, we use other sexual satisfaction methods such as masturbation.

Too much alcohol use and substance abuse might reduce the ability to use condom amongst those who are committed to consistent condom use. Ahmed told me that he does not drink alcohol himself, but he expressed his experience with friends who fail to use condoms when they drink too much alcohol.

I have many *zega* friends who also want to use condom every time they have sex. But due to their habit of too much drinking of alcohol, they lose their power to say no for sex without condom. They don't even remember to use condom while having sex.

Water-based, sexual lubricants are still uncommon in Addis Ababa. However, some people have access to lubricants from abroad.

One of our friends explained to us about *maleslesha* [lubricant] he used it while having sex with a white man. He also showed us the lubricant and gave us two pieces to try it ourselves. I tried it and liked it. It reduces pain during sexual intercourse. After that, I have so many friends from Europe and America on Facebook and they brought me lubricant whenever they were visiting Ethiopia (Bamlaku, 38 years old)

My friends from the US and Canada bring me lubricants and I do not have much problem on accessing lubricants (Ahmed, 24 years old).

While some people thus have access to lubricants through friends living in Western countries, others do not even know about water-based sexual lubricants. Many participants in this study said that they use some kind of lubricant at times or every time that they have sex. The lubricants commonly used are saliva, Vaseline and oil.

Like condoms, there is a different feeling in using lubrication among *kelawoch* and *ketawoch*. Though lubricants are generally believed to be important for both *kelawoch* and *ketawoch*, they are believed to be more important for *ketawoch* to reduce pain during receptive anal sex.

Lubricants are more important for the *keta*. But there are also those who enjoy sex without a lubricant. If the person I am having sex with is someone whom I love, I choose not to use a lubricant. I use those watery lubricants when my partners come from foreign countries. Otherwise I cannot get them here. We commonly use saliva and Vaseline (Husen, 40 years old).

7 CONCLUSION

During the last decade, the issue of homosexuality has circulated as a topic in the media and public discussions in Ethiopia. It has received relatively more attention over the past five years, during which time it has been addressed in newspapers, magazines and books, and sometimes on national television and radio. Until recently, issues relating to homosexuality were largely unspoken about in Ethiopian society. It might therefore be of interest to examine these differences and consider both why the issue of homosexuality was not spoken about before and how this issue has come to be established as important within public discourse now. Thus, this section will begin by discussing these matters and will conclude with a summary of the major research findings that have been presented in this thesis.

7.1 Homosexuality was a little discussed issue in public in Ethiopia: why?

There are many factors that might have contributed to the lack of attention historically granted to the topic of homosexuality in Ethiopia and an independent study of these matters might be necessary for a thorough understanding of them. However, three important findings have been derived from the literature that was reviewed in connection with this study and the insights obtained from the research participants during the fieldwork – namely, the role of the unified church and state administration that existed until 1974, the tendency to regard homosexual practices as practices belonging to Western cultures only, and the relative lack of information about the existence of homosexuals in Ethiopia.

7.1.1 The unitary of church and state in the early administration in Ethiopia

Until 1974, church and state administration in Ethiopia had been united and the law of the country had been coined by church scholars. While the first modern school in Ethiopia was opened in the 20th century, the first codified law of the country was coined, by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) scholars, in the 15th century when Ethiopia adopted *Fetha Negast* (the law of the kings, which has both secular and spiritual parts) from Egypt. This law served the country until the first written constitutional law was drafted in 1931. The social and legal system of the country, as a whole, was devised by the church's tradition.

As is implied by the term *gibre Sodom* (act of the sodomite), the church has been condemning and teaching against homosexual practices. Beyond coining this term, the church has been

preaching that *gibre Sodom* (see footnote 19) is a sinful act – an act which is against the natural law of reproduction and unacceptable according to the Christian doctrine (Archbishop Abba Samuel, 2007)

The unified state and church administration represented an opportunity for the church to maintain its position on homosexuality and close all loopholes that might have arisen from the side of the state to allow for compromise on the issue. Consequently, talking about homosexuality and homosexual practices was seen as shameful and sinful over many centuries in Ethiopia (Archbishop Abba Samuel, 2007). As Marc Epprecht indicated in his book, one of the reasons for the emergence of a gay subculture in southern Africa was “the decline of African churches in teaching about heterosexuality as opposed to homosexuality” (Epprecht, 2008).

7.1.2 The relating of homosexuality with the ‘Western culture’

Homosexuality debates in Africa have often focused on whether homosexuality exists in Africa and whether homosexuality is African or not. Though many of those who were arguing against the existence of homosexual practices in Africa now seem to acknowledge the existence of homosexuals and homosexual practices, the debate on the issue of whether homosexuality is “African” or “un-African” is still going on in some parts of the continent. The main premise of those who claim that homosexuality is “un-African” is the idea that same-sex sexual practices were brought to Africa during colonial times. This debate is still going on and even some influential media organizations such as the BBC and MSNBC have been hosting such debates (BBC, 2011; Maddow, 2010). Given the prevalence of this idea it might not be surprising to find people in Ethiopia who deny the existence of homosexual practices, especially since Ethiopia has never been colonized. If one assumes that homosexual practices were indeed brought to Africa during times of colonial rule and by colonial forces, the existence of homosexual practices might not be expected in a country that has never been colonized. This might have contributed to the lack of attention on homosexuality in the public discourses in Ethiopia.

7.1.3 Existing research on homosexuality issues was not disseminated

A limited number of studies have reported on homosexuality and the existence of homosexual practices in Ethiopia over the past 100 years. Studies conducted between the 19th and 20th century incorporated issues related to homosexuality and reported that homosexual activities were being practiced in different parts of the country. In the northern part of the country, age-

based homosexual relationships existed between Eritrean boys and older Italian men (Ambrogetti, 1900) and amongst the ‘defective’ men who were viewed as ‘god’s mistakes’ among the Amhara people (Messing, 1957). In the southern part of Ethiopia, there was the *sagoda* (effeminate person) in the Konso village who liked to play the passive role in male-to-male sex (Hallpike, 1972) and the *ashtime* (biological man performing female roles) who considered himself to be ‘neither a man or a woman’ (Donham, 1985). Male-to-male sexual relationships were also present in Hararri and amongst the nearby Oromo and Somali pastoralists in the eastern part of the country (Murray & Roscoe, 2001). And, there existed homosexual relations among shepherd boys in the central part of Ethiopia, within the Qemant tribe (Gamst, 1969).

However, all of the above-mentioned studies were conducted by European and American researchers, and their findings were published only in their own languages. Moreover, since many of these studies were conducted before the establishment of higher academic institutions in Ethiopia, the findings did not have the potential to be disseminated or used in academic settings in Ethiopia.

7.2 Homosexuality is becoming a public discourse in Ethiopia: how?

During the last decade, particularly since 2008, a relatively wider coverage of the issue of homosexuality has come to the Ethiopian public through print and electronic media. A book that was published by Archbishop Abba Samuel, Archbishop of the Addis Ababa Diocese was the first book written in Ethiopia on the issue of homosexuality and contributed to the emergence of issues of homosexuality throughout public agendas and discourses (Archbishop Abba Samuel, 2007). The first of this type of wide coverage was instigated four years ago by the Ethiopian religious leaders’ forum (a forum of four major religions in the country: the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, Ethiopian Muslims, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church and the Ethiopian Catholic Church). It was in December 2008 that this forum, for the first time, organized a national conference to condemn homosexuality and to call upon the government to ban homosexual practices in the country’s constitution³⁸ (AFP, 2008).

³⁸ The constitution of Ethiopia does not talk about homosexual practice, but homosexual practice is criminalized in the criminal code Article 629, and punishable with simple imprisonment.

The conference was co-organized by United for Life Ethiopia, a religious affiliated organization working on, among others, anti-homosexuality, anti-abortion. Besides condemning homosexuality as ‘unnatural’ and ‘immoral’, the conference also portrayed homosexual men as the prime causes for the then widely spread paedophilia in the country. During that time, a large number of sexual abuse cases involving male children were reported by the police, particularly in the capital Addis Ababa (Tadele, 2001, 2009). The conference convened more than 1000 participants, including religious leaders, government officials, journalists and members of anti-homosexual organizations, passed a resolution that describes homosexual practices are “the pinnacles of immorality” and called for a constitutional ban (AFP, 2008; Life, 2007).

After the conference, the religious leaders’ forum and United for Life Ethiopia (an organization working on organizing anti-homosexual campaigns in Ethiopia) have continued reporting about homosexual practices in Ethiopia, attempting to defame the practice using the media. Men who have sex with men at the same time created various platforms for speaking about themselves and their practices and, most importantly, for defending themselves against the paedophilia allegations. A number of websites and blogs, as well as Yahoo groups and Facebook fun pages have been created since 2008 (EthioLGBT, 2008, 2009; Rose, 2009). International media have also started to report about men who have sex with men in Ethiopia and this also contributed to public discussions of this type in Ethiopia (AFP, 2008).

Men who have sex with men are disproportionately vulnerable to HIV, globally and in Africa (Baral, Sifakis, Cleghorn, & Beyrer, 2007; UNAIDS, 2009). Motivated by this fact, a few research projects involving men who have sex with men have been conducted by Ethiopian researchers over the past few years, mainly for the purpose of addressing the issue of HIV among such men. The reports published by some of these researchers have evoked a lot of discussion among many people in Addis Ababa (Balcha, 2009).

7.3 Same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa

It has previously been reported that same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa are hidden and hard-to-reach for research. However, such men were neither hidden nor hard-to-reach for this particular research project. Though it might not be possible to conclude that they are visible to everyone, my fieldwork experience taught me that same-sex attracted men could be accessed by

those who wish to reach them. Of course, establishing contact with such men was my explicit task during the feasibility phase of this study. Although I had never known a single same-sex attracted man before the start of this study, it only took me one week to successfully search for men who are attracted to men when I decided to do so.

On their side, same-sex attracted men have desires to contact others and they are connected to everyone else in one or another way and throughout their daily lives.

Same-sex attracted men in Addis Ababa have formed a subculture in which they have defined their sexual relationships and life-styles, as well as the ways in which they interpret the law, religion and culture. Though many men are unhappy with the presence of the criminalizing law against same-sex practices in Ethiopia, the law does not appear to represent a particularly large obstacle for them in their day to day lives. However, many starkly criticized the law for mainly one reason; they believe that it makes it possible for persons to mistreat them merely because they suspect someone of being *zega* (see footnote 14). However, none of the participants in this study had experienced arrest or prosecution due to their sexual practices, even at times when they were suspected or identified.

The relations to family members are of significant importance and considerable concern for most study participants. Long-term relationships and marriage were not common among *zegoch* due to fears of being stigmatized by families and friends, as well as the fear of bringing shame to their families. Family expectations on the one hand, and men's sexual preference on the other, are conflicting issues in the lives of *zegoch* and many study participants had experienced worries and stress as a result of this conflict. Families expect their sons to get married and have kids.

The bonds between same-sex attracted men appear to be very strong in many cases, and many contribute to arrange opportunities through which men can maintain their friendships and establish new ones, including parties, sporting events, cinema and *khat* and *shisha* house gatherings, among others.

As most other people in Ethiopia, *zegoch* have religious affiliations to one of the religious denominations in Ethiopia and attend religious rituals to varying degrees. Some have higher level religious trainings and provide services in their respective religions, while others simply follow their family's religion and do not do anything more than attending major religious celebrations.

Some study participants said that they are worried about their homosexual practices, which they believe are not allowed in their religions, and they said that they want to remain in touch with their God in worshipping and to be excused for their deeds.

An attempt was made to understand how participants deal with law, religion and culture, all of which disallow and condemn homosexual practices in Ethiopia. Out of the law that criminalizes same-sex relations, the families who expect heterosexual relationships and the religions that do not allow homosexual relationships, all discussion participants agreed on one thing – namely, that it was their religion that affected them the most, but concerns relating to men's families were nearly, if not equally, important. Some had tried to abandon homosexual practices (and some were still trying), but all study participants think that it seems impossible for them to get out of *zega* life because of the value and joy that they associate with the social interactions it represents.

It has previously been reported that men who have sex with men in Ethiopia have misconceptions and myths about HIV transmission and prevention (S.H. Gebreyesus & Mariam, 2009; Tadele, 2010). However, many participants in this study did not have obvious misconceptions about HIV transmission and prevention and were instead able to discuss a variety of HIV transmission modes and prevention methods. Men who have sex with men comprise a diverse group; some are advanced degree holders and some high school dropouts. Understandably, therefore, many do not want to be perceived as members of a group where everyone is alike.

Many same-sex practising men do not go to a health facility for treatment when they are ill, and particularly when experiencing symptoms that could be related to their sexual practices (such as anal bleeding or anal prolapse), mainly because they fear discrimination from health care workers and the leaking of information about their sexuality.

In conversations about health, many participants focused on structural issues related to health care more than physical or mental health problems. On the background of bad experiences with health care providers, who they said often failed to provide them with non-discriminatory medical treatment, many men lack faith in the health system and do not seek support from health facilities. Some had felt interrogated by physicians when going for treatment and then shared

information about these bad experiences with other *zegoch*, thus rendering the seeking of medical support from health facilities even less common.

Instead, some *zegoch* have started treating each other for some health problems, using the experience and knowledge that they have accumulated over several years. They explained that the health problems that they may experience in relation to their sexual practice are among those senior *zegoch* have developed skills in treating. Besides worries and stress, the most commonly raised health problems among *zegoch* participating in this study were symptoms from the anal area, including anal fissures, anal bleeding and anal prolapse.

Sex is an important part of life for many *zegoch*. Many pointed out that sex is not limited to penile-anal intercourse, but that they can equally please themselves and their partners with different forms of sexual and romantic practices that present less risk of HIV transmission. Many of them mentioned satisfaction obtained from sleeping together and mutual masturbation.

Many were aware that water-based lubricants are important for the practice of safer anal sex, but pointed out that the health system does not provide them with lubricants. While almost everyone well understood that condom use prevents HIV transmission, there were some participants who said that they have never been using condom at all as well as many who do not use condoms during having sex with their close friends. Many have the knowledge of sexual practices that have more risks of transmitting HIV including anal-penile sexual intercourse.

There would appear to be several opportunities for the health sector to contribute to improving health and preventing HIV among same-sex practicing men. Among other things, there exist strong bonds between many *zegoch* and they exchange a great deal of information that pertains to them. This circumstance could and should be drawn on for collaborative health promotion and disease prevention efforts.

However, many *zegoch* are currently more or less detached from the health care system due to the lacking availability of friendly services and a fear of stigma and discrimination. If the health system decides to work in partnership with same-sex attracted men, listens to them and asks them about their health needs and how to address, include and involve them, it might be possible to achieve important health and HIV-related goals in a cost-effective and efficient way using the networks that already exist.

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APPENDIX 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

1. THE LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ZEGOCH

I. SEXUL RELATIONSHIP AMONG *ZEGOCH*

1. Your childhood memories related to sex and sexuality
2. First experiences of your sexual feelings/practices?
3. What is the Amharic version to call your sexual orientation/identity? Why do you think this name was given to an orientation/identity like yours?
4. How do you like the name given to your sexual orientation/identity?
5. First sexual encounter?

II. SOCIAL LIFE

6. Are the overall life of a zega has differences with a non-zega person?
7. What do you think are the differences? What about similarities?
8. What are the joys, thrills, and excitements you experience in your daily as a zega?
9. What are the challenges, problems and difficulties you have been experiencing so far due to being a zega?
10. How do you explain the legal situation related to same-sex sexualities in Ethiopia?
11. How do you see the religious bodies' interaction on homosexuality in Ethiopia?
12. How do you see the cultural challenges against homosexuality in Ethiopia?
13. Among the legal, spiritual and cultural challenges, which one do you think is more negatively affecting zego to come out in public? Why?
14. Love
15. Is there a sense of love in same-sex relations? How is it reflected
16. Your love stories; (have you ever been in relationship that was so attractive and beautiful?)
17. Attraction
18. Your preference to and experience with women?
19. What are the problems people sometimes face when they are in relationships with other men? Why?

20. What things attract you to a man?
21. What things do not attract you to a man?
22. Partnership
23. Was it easy for you to get a partner? How do you explain partner finding in the zega community in Addis?
24. Relationship
25. How do you explain the relationship you had with your first sexual partner? (e.g. How did you meet, love and attraction between two of you, how long you stayed in a relationship etc)
26. If you are no more in a relationship with him, why did you break with your first partner?
27. Do you think many zegoch lead a life in a stable relationship such as cohabitants or married couples? Please explain me your experience
28. Power

2. HEALTH AND HEALTHY LIFE

29. About Healthy life
30. What is health for you?
31. What is a healthy life?
32. Do you think your understanding about health is different from others? In what ways?
33. What are the things you do to live a healthy life?
34. How do you feel and act when you perceive yourself as healthy?
35. What kinds of things do you perceive influence your health in positive and negative ways?
36. Are there some health challenges that are particular to same- sex attracted men? Which ones, do you think?

III. OPPORTUNITIES TO LEAD A HEALTHY LIFE

37. Are there things that make same- sex practicing men more healthier/less healthier than non-zegoch?

IV. HEALTH RELATED CHALLENGES OF ZEGOCH IN ADDIS

38. Are some of the things impacting zegoch not to lead a healthy life? What do you think they are?

V. HEALTH SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF ZEGOCH

3. THE CHALLENGES OF AND RESPONSE TO HIV

VI. UNDERSTANDING ABOUT HIV

- 39. What does HIV mean for you?
- 40. How do you explain HIV and AIDS?

VII. PERCEIVED RISKS OF HIV

- 41. Do you think that you are vulnerable to HIV? How/why?
- 42. What do you think are HIV-related risks? How/why?
- 43. Are Zegoch more vulnerable to HIV than non-Zegoch? Why?

VIII. WAYS TO PREVENT HIV AMONG *ZEGOCH*

- 44. What does safer sex mean for you?
- 45. How do you practice safer sex?
- 46. How do you think important to be free from HIV? Why?
- 47. Do you think they test for HIV? Why?
- 48. How do you see self-initiated HIV prevention efforts among zegoch?
- 49. How zegoch prevent HIV transmission through sexual intercourse?

IX. CONDOM USE AMONG *ZEGOCH*

- 50. Condom use experience
- 51. Obstacles for non-use
- 52. Availability, skill to use and behaviour

X. USE OF LUBRICATION

- 53. understanding and experience with lubricants
- 54. availability and use of lubricants

XI. LIVING WITH HIV

- 55. What does 'living with HIV' mean for you?
- 56. Have you ever tested for HIV?
- 57. What encouraged you to get tested?
- 58. How was your HIV result?
- 59. How is living with HIV?
- 60. Are you taking ARV?
- 61. How do you manage life with ARV?
- 62. Have you ever told to people that you are HIV positive?

- 63. To whom you have told to?
- 64. What did they feel when you told them that you are HIV positive?
- 65. How easy or difficult for you to tell your HIV positive status?
- 66. What do you think exposed you to contract HIV?
- 67. How do you explain stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV?
- 68. Have you experienced any sort of stigma, discrimination or exclusion due to your HIV positive status? Please explain it.

XII. HIV AS A HEALTH ISSUE

- 69. To what degree and in what ways is HIV perceived to be of relevance to your health?
- 70. How do you see HIV/AIDS related services targeting same-sex practicing men in Addis?

APPENDIX 2 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Invitation to participate in a research project

Perspectives on Life and Health

This is an invitation for you to participate in a research project! The project tries to understand how people live and understand their lives in general, and how they think about and deal with health issues of different types.

We try to learn about these issues by being together with people and through conversations with people. In some instances the researcher join people in some of their daily activities for a short or long period of time, and these issues can then be discussed as we get to know each other. In other cases people are invited to take part in interviews where we sit down together and talk through thoughts, ideas and experiences people have of relevance to the mentioned topics.

The study is undertaken by a researcher as part of his master's degree training in community health at the University of Oslo, Norway (together with his supervisors). The researcher spends time with and talk to several men about these issues. At the end of the project he will try to put together all the thoughts and experiences people have shared with him in a thesis which will be available for people to read through the internet pages of the University of Oslo.

The researcher takes notes from conversations and experiences, but never records people's name or any information that could make others realize who they are. He uses a nickname instead, and never write down other specific information about people either (e.g. he will not record things like where you live, work, study or like to spend your free time). What you discuss with the researcher can thus never be traced to you as a person.

Some of the issues discussed in the project may have to do with sexuality, and we would like to involve men with different sexual experiences in the project. Some will have heterosexual experiences, others will have one or more homosexual experiences and yet others may have both hetero- and homosexual experiences. One of the issues the study would like to focus on is how people with different types of sexual practices may have differing experiences and challenges in their life and regarding their health

By participating in this study you would help increase knowledge about the life experiences and health challenges as they pertain to men in Addis Ababa. This knowledge could be of importance for future health programs in Ethiopia and abroad. For you as an individual there may perhaps be no direct benefits as a result of participation. However, some people find it useful to take part in research of this kind because participation represent an opportunity to reflect over, and become more aware of, issues that are important in their lives.

I would like to make you aware of some of the standard rules that are normally followed in research projects across the world and which will be carefully observed in this study too:

- Participation in the study is voluntary.
- Persons who decide to take part can withdraw from it later at any time they wish without any negative consequences and without providing an explanation.
- Participants can choose not to answer any or all of the questions asked during conversations.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. If you would like to contact the persons involved in this study, you can reach us in the following ways:

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APPENDIX 3 ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTERS FROM NORWAY AND ETHIOPIA



UNIVERSITETET I OSLO DET MEDISINSKE FAKULTET

Kåre Moen
Institutt for helse og samfunn,
Avdeling for samfunnsmedisin
Postboks 1130 Blindern
0318 Oslo

Regional Committee for Medical Research
South-East Norway, Section C
P.B 1130 Blindern
NO-0318 Oslo

Phone: +47 22 84 55 21

Date: 01.07.2011
Your ref.: 2011/1032
Our ref.: IRB 0000 1870

E-mail: post@helseforskning.etikk.no
Homepage: <http://helseforskning.etikk.no>

To whom it may concern

With regards to the study *Perspectives on life and health: A qualitative study among men who have sex with men in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia*

We hereby confirm that the Regional Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics, section South-East C, Norway, has received the project *Perspectives on life and health: A qualitative study among men who have sex with men in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia* for review. The project was discussed on the 9th of June 2011.

The ethics committee system consists of seven independent regional committees, with authority to either approve or disapprove medical research studies conducted within Norway, or by Norwegian institutions, in accordance with ACT 2008-06-20 no. 44: Act on medical and health research (the Health Research Act).


The abovementioned study is exempt from review in Norway, as its principal aim is to further knowledge regarding the *perception* of health and challenges facing men who have sex with men, not to specifically study health and disease as such, cf. § 4.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Regional Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics, section South-East C (REK Sør-Øst C) if further information is required.


Yours sincerely,

Arvid Heiberg MD, PhD (sign.)
Professor of Medicine,
University of Oslo

Chair, Regional Committee
for Medical and Health Research Ethics,
section South-East C


Tor Even Svanes
Senior Advisor

Regional Committee for
Medical and Health
Research Ethics, section
South-East C

	Addis Ababa University Medical Faculty Institutional Review Board	SOP# AAUMF 008 Version 2.0 Effective date: 1 Feb. 2009 Page 13 of 13
	Title: 3.2. Use of Study Assessment Form	

ANNEX 3

Form AAUMF 03-008

IRB's Decision

Meeting No: 040/2011

Date (D/M/Y): November23/2011

Protocol number: 083/11/SPH

Assigned No.....

Protocol Title: Perspectives of life and health: a qualitative study among same sex practicing men in AA, Ethiopia.	
Principal Investigators:	Mekonnen Aderaw
Institute:	AAU-MF School of Public Health
Elements Reviewed (AAUMF 01-008)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Not attached
Review of Revised Application <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Date of Previous review:
Decision of the meeting:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Approved with Recommendation <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission <input type="checkbox"/> Disapproved

- I. Elements approved-
1. Protocol Version No.
 2. Protocol Version Date.....
 3. Informed consent Version No.
 4. Informed Consent Version Date

II. Obligations of the PI-

1. Should comply with the standard international & national scientific and ethical guidelines
2. All amendments and changes made in protocol and consent form needs IRB approval
3. The PI should report SAE within 10 days of the event
4. End of the study, including manuscripts and thesis works should be reported to the IRB

III. TO ESTM ☐

Institution Review Board (IRB) Approval: Period from 01/12/2011 to 30/12/2013

Follow up report expected in

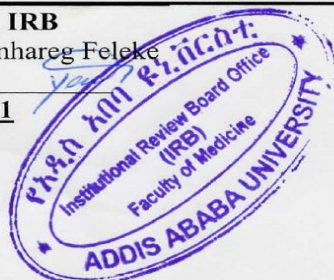
3 Months ____ 6 months ☒ 9 months ____ one year ____

Chairperson, IRB

Prof. Yeweyenhareg Feleke

Signature _____

Date: 01/12/11



Associate Dean for

Postgraduate and Research

Signature _____

Date _____